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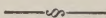
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Sermons

BY THE REV. H. P. LIDDON, D.D., D.C.L.,

Canon of St. Paul's.



THE OBLIGATIONS OF HUMAN BROTHERHOOD.*

“And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel, thy brother? and he said, I know not; am I my brother's keeper?”—GEN. iv. 9.

THIS is the earliest utterance which expresses the relation of indifference or hostility between man and man which was one of the results of the disobedience of our first parents. As St. Paul says tersely, “By one man's disobedience many were made sinners.” Most assuredly they were sinners against God, sinners against their fellow-men. Adam could not transmit that robe of righteousness which had been at the first super-added to his natural endowments, and which was forfeited by his sin. And this man, left to the purely animal instinct of uncontrolled and unaided nature, became estranged, not only from God, but also from his brother man. As his higher intelligence was obscured, so his affections were contracted. He shrank back into himself. He lived, he worked, he thought for himself; and self-preservation and self-assertion absorbed all the energies which were due, first, to the honour of his Maker, and then to the care of and consideration for his brethren. Had Adam never fallen, we may certainly presume that the human family might have multiplied indefinitely, while all its members would still have been united by the bonds of an unchanged affection. But the withdrawal of supernatural grace at the Fall meant the impetuous insurgence of selfish passion, and the blood of Abel and the question of Cain marked the new relations of enmity or of indifference between man and man which were its first results.

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, Sunday afternoon, April 29th, 1888.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" This question, first asked over the bleeding corpse of Abel, accurately represents the general spirit of the old heathen world. In that world, notwithstanding its abundant and varied interest, one thing is clear; every nation, every tribe, every class lived for itself. Every man was, at heart, more or less consciously, the rival, if not the enemy, of some other man. There was no real bond in the ancient world to keep men together. A tribe or a nation had a certain coherence imposed upon it by self-interest or by force. With the outside world it had no relations based on a higher sense of duty or affection. Even religion, which should traverse the divisions among human beings, and which by knowledge and love of a common Father in heaven should unite those who are divided by race or by prejudice—even religion, when its creed had degenerated into polytheism, only accentuated the deep divisions of the human family. Every country, or nearly every country, had its own religion, just as it had its own laws and language and polity and customs. Its religion was a part of the national furniture, and a local or national god was not to be held responsible for anything—if, indeed, he was powerful to do anything—beyond the frontiers of the people who worshipped him. It will be in your recollections that, after the great defeat of the Syrians, the advisers of the Syrian king, Ben-hadad, urged that, if only an engagement with the forces of Israel could be brought on in the plain, it would be probably successful, since they imagined that the power of the God of Israel was strictly confined, for political reasons, to the hills; and it was this difficulty of conceiving of a Deity who had more than a local or national sway which led the heathen philosopher, Celsus, to say that a man must be mad who could suppose that Greeks and barbarians, that Europeans and Asiatics and Africans, could ever be united in the bonds of the same religion. Thus it was that Paganism, as a religion, did nothing to restore fellowship among men, and the only great efforts made to bring men together in the ancient world were made by conquest. Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and, last of all, and more successfully than any before, Romans, attempted to found an empire of the world; but this endeavour to bring men into one society was not based on any sense of duty of man to man. It was, at best, an effort to rear an imposing monument to the selfish pride of a single race on the wide-

spread humiliation and enslavement of the rest. How little the nations of antiquity with which we are acquainted—and which may be taken to be, on the whole, favourably representative of the rest—realised that man is his brother's keeper will be seen if we consider how truly it has been observed that the ancient world, with its great institutions, its imposing civilisation, its splendid literature, its imperishable reputation in philosophy and in statesmanship, was yet a world without love. It cherished virtues which looked like charity. It made much, for instance, of liberality. In the ancient world it was much more common to give costly presents than it is among us. The museums of Europe are full of inscriptions which show how prodigal and how numerous were donations of all kinds, whether of a public or of a private character. Men who could afford it gave generously to the state, or to their birthplace, as well as to their guests or friends or relatives. One man builds a new theatre for his native city; another constructs a new road or an aqueduct; another rebuilds the ruined walls of the town in which he lives; or he erects baths in which the whole population may enjoy for nothing the advantages of cleanliness and refreshment; or he founds public libraries which are open to all; or he procures large importations of corn to be sold at a low price, or distributed gratis to a specified number of the poorer citizens. No man of wealth in ancient Rome, who desired worthily to fill his position in the state, could well decline the duty of giving away a share of his private wealth for the benefit of his fellow-citizens or for the public good. The value of liberality as a public and social virtue was unquestioned. This evidence of public spirit was, we must admit, a fine thing in its way, and it may suggest that some of us fall even below the heathen standard in these matters. But, as has been said, it was liberality—it was charity.

Now, how does liberality differ from charity? The material result may in some cases be almost precisely the same, as in the provisions made in ancient days and since for cheap bread; but the motive has been radically different. Christian charity thinks only of the recipient; pagan liberality only of the giver. Christian charity looks at the distress of the needy; pagan liberality at the social position, or the political ends or ambitions, or at what is expected or hoped for from the donor.

Pagan liberality is anxious that the recipient should be pleased ; Christian charity that he should be really benefited. The object of charity is to relieve suffering ; the object of liberality was to make friends. Christian charity was, at bottom, self-denying ; pagan liberality was, at bottom, self-seeking. Christian charity, said the Apostle who was its great preacher, "seeketh not her own." Pagan liberality, even when it made vast pecuniary sacrifices, sought nothing else but her own, and would have thought it foolish to do otherwise. The consequence of this difference in spirit is apparent in the results. According to the calculations of a scholar who has devoted himself especially to these investigations, one million five hundred thousand pounds sterling was spent during the great days of the Roman Empire in the way of public largesses in the city of Rome alone. Nothing was really done for the most suffering members of the population. The two hundred thousand recipients of grain in Rome did not receive enough to support their families. The great mass of the wealth which was distributed fell into the hands of those who were not really in want, but whom it was important, politically speaking, to conciliate. There were no hospitals at any time in ancient Rome ; there were not even any poorhouses. The building for the reception of the sick which was erected by the Emperor Antoninus Pius was in reality a hostelry for pilgrims to the shrine of the God of Healing ; it was not a hospital. No provision was made for widows or for orphans or for foundlings ; and those who could not claim the honour of citizenship had no relief whatever extended to them. On the other hand, the vast sums which were profusely expended by public men tended to make the Roman people dislike work, and devote themselves to pleasure with ever-increasing eagerness. When Julius Cæsar triumphed, the people were feasted at twenty-two thousand tables. Even under the philosophic Marcus Aurelius public games and gladiatorial shows were provided for the people on a hundred and thirty-five days in the year. The gladiatorial shows, in which men killed each other publicly for the amusement of thousands of their fellow-creatures, were the most costly and the most popular of public entertainments. Public men like Cæsar kept a large store of gladiators ready to be produced in the amphitheatre when a show might be politically desirable. Liberality of this kind

secured popularity for the worst of the Emperors. Witness the crowd which went out to meet the Emperor Nero when, after murdering his own mother, he entered Rome, robed in white and crowned with wreaths of flowers. There was in the mind of such a people no relation whatever between a profuse liberality and a life of virtue.

Let us be just. A great calamity would sometimes appeal not in vain to a higher sense of duty in the old pagan world. When, in the reign of Nero, a great theatre fell, and buried in its ruins nearly fifty thousand spectators, the wealthy Romans sent physicians and all kinds of medical appliances to the scene of the catastrophe, and they received the wounded into their houses. When in the year A.D. 69 Pompeii and Herculaneum were overwhelmed by an eruption of Vesuvius, there was a general readiness in Italy to relieve those who escaped with their lives from the burning lava. But these efforts attracted a great deal of notice because they were exceptional. The rule in the ancient world was to let suffering shift for itself. Even the great orator Quintilian could only speak of the poor as "loathsome"; and, if Aristotle had in one age described slaves as "animated tools," Cato in another could speak of them as "cattle in the straw"—so little did some of the finest minds and the noblest natures in the ancient world believe man to be in any true sense his brother's keeper.

It was the Mosaic law (let us never forget it) which first said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." It was the law which ordered that "the stranger which dwelleth among you shall be unto you as one born among you. Thou shalt love him as thyself." And the picture of a good man which is so often drawn for us, and by different hands, in the Psalms generally insists on this side of human duty. "A good man is merciful and lendeth." "Blessed is he that considereth the poor and needy." Job is called a "father of the poor." The Proverbs, in which the highest wisdom is so tersely condensed, tell us that, while "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel," he that hath mercy on the poor honoureth God. Israel knew that God is merciful, and this knowledge made a profound difference in a Jew's estimate of duty towards other men. The Prophets contain passages on this subject which were quite foreign to the spirit of the old paganism. Thus Isaiah says: "Is

not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?" But before our Lord came the force and beauty of this teaching was warped and withered by the intense and, it must be added, narrow feeling of nationality which set in after the Captivity. The close contact with the heathen in the Captivity did more than anything else towards limiting the range of love in Jewish hearts by the idea of the nation. The law said, "Love thy neighbour," but the later Jew answered the question, "Who is my neighbour?" in the narrowest sense. He even excluded the Samaritan. Charity became formal, restricted, mechanical. Such a life of piety as that of Tobias shows how much that was saintly yet survived; and what can be more beautiful than his advice to his son?—"Be merciful after thy power. If thou hast much, give plenteously. If thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little." But the later Jew not seldom took heed that he did his alms before men to be seen of them; and so he had no reward of his Father which was in heaven. And the Talmud told him that alms should neither be given to nor accepted from the heathen, since the heathen were not entitled to kindness or compassion.

If our Lord had not come among us, things would have gone on in this way. The obligations of human brotherhood would have been largely or altogether repudiated, even to the end. He, indeed, might have said with better reason than Cain, "Am I the keeper of a corrupt and rebellious race?" He might have chosen to remain in the glory which He had with the Father before the world was; but He did choose to say, "Lo, I come." He came to be born at Bethlehem. He came to obey and work for thirty years at Nazareth. He came to undergo the agony and the bloody sweat of Gethsemane. He came to die on Calvary. He came—He the Infinite and the Eternal—to take on Himself, with our mortal flesh, all the humiliations and the woes of poverty, all the griefs and sorrows—nay, all the crimes and degradations—of man's fallen estate. He took on Him a burden which,

as we know, was not His, but ours; and it was when this burden pressed with all its dreadful weight on His sinless soul and His wounded body that the cry escaped Him: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He made Himself the Keeper and the Saviour of our sinful humanity; and as, to the eye of faith, through the ages of Christendom, He hangs upon His cross, sinners see in Him their representative and their propitiation before the awful purity of God, and His blood has a significance and a power which they cannot mistake. It is, says the apostolic writer, "the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than that of Abel." Abel's blood recalls, for all time, the word of the murderer: "Am I my brother's keeper?" The blood of Jesus is that of the Shepherd of souls, dying of His free will, not only for His brethren, but for His enemies.

"Abel's blood for vengeance
Pleaded to the skies;
But the Blood of Jesus
For our pardon cries."

And this event, the death of Jesus our Lord on Calvary, is the turning-point, depend upon it, in the history of the moral education of the human race. "I," He said, "when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." At the foot of that cross on which His arms are stretched that they may embrace the world, we learn not only our own needs and what has been done by Infinite Love to meet them, but also our duties and how we should understand them. "Ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that when He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich." "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them." Beneath His cross we understand, at length, how He would have construed Cain's phrase, "my brother." They are everywhere our brethren, because He, our Elder Brother, died for all. You are wealthy, and that poor man who lives near you, and has little or nothing, is your brother. Or you are poor, and your brother is that wealthy neighbour of whom you think, perhaps, habitually with envy, if not with anger. Our brethren are not confined to those who can enter into our thoughts and sympathies; they are also those whose narrowness and ignorance make mutual sympathy and

intelligence impossible. They are not only those who are honest and respectable, but they are those who are under the ban of society, outside the frontiers of decent and civilised life. Our brethren—they are not only our near relations by blood; they are not only our fellow-townsmen or our fellow-countrymen; they are not confined to the races which are now in the van of civilisation, or have in past days played a great part in the world's affairs. They are also the races on whose rights civilisation is apt to trample with such heartless selfishness. They are the Indians of Australia and of America; they are the Maoris of New Zealand; they are the islanders of the Pacific. Our brethren are everywhere. On every human life has fallen from the Cross, whether it be recognised or no, a ray of Divine compassion. All have been objects of that world-embracing guardianship, and when we have learnt the first lessons of the gospel we understand that, in some sense, each of us, like the Divine Redeemer, is his brother's keeper. And our duty in this matter is, and must be, measured by our endowments. "If thou hast much"—much truth, much time, much wealth at thy disposal—"give plenteously. If thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little."

This duty of care and love which man owes to man is, no doubt, to be paid in part by efforts to improve the bodily and material circumstances of those who need it. Our Lord Jesus Christ went about doing good—doing good in this restricted sense. He kept two classes especially in His view, or, rather, constantly about Him—the poor and the sick. They sought Him—many of them—only for the sake of what He could do to relieve their pain or their hunger; but He did not on that account disallow their company, though He did point out the unworthiness of the motive which controlled them. Certainly the poor and the suffering were His associates. He lived with them; He died among them. The Gospels, in the main, are a long record of His various relations with them. Nay, when He would name a class that should continue to represent Him among men when He had Himself withdrawn from sight, He chose not the wise and learned, not the powerful and the wealthy, but the poor and the suffering. It is of these that He will say: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

And thus it was that the Christian Church was no sooner founded than it appeared as a society for the relief of suffering and poverty. As in a family where strict tenacity of private rights is overshadowed by a sense of common life, common objects, reciprocated affections, none of these first Christians said that "aught of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common." One order of the sacred ministry was largely, although not exclusively, devoted to the administration of the public fund; and there were common meals—afterwards, it is true, at Corinth, leading to the desecration of the Holy Communion, which, nevertheless, were originally instituted in order to provide for the regular sustenance of the poorer members of the Church.

Not to dwell too long on so attractive and so vast a subject, what a delightful picture is that which is presented to us in the Acts of the Apostles of a poor Christian woman, Tabitha of Joppa, "full of the good works and of the almsdeeds which she did!" She must have had plenty to do in the narrow dirty streets and bazaars of the old Phœnician seaport town: and there she spent her life till the end came; there she gave her time and her labour and her little wealth to help the needy and the suffering as her Lord had done before. But for Him—but for His life of compassion and His death of voluntarily accepted pain—Tabitha would have been leading a very different kind of life at Joppa or elsewhere, and there would have been so much the more unrelieved pain and want in the history of our race. Or take a man like Gaius, of whom all that we know is that St. John tells us that he did faithfully whatever he did to the brethren and to strangers. In those early days, remember, Christians were constantly moving from place to place. See what is said of Aquila and Priscilla, of Apollos, of Zenas, and of others, and you will observe that these and others were continually journeying about, whether for public or for private reasons. Such busy circulation could only be possible if some members of the Church devoted themselves to entertaining the travellers; and this is why so much stress is laid in the apostolic epistles on the virtue of hospitality. "Use hospitality one to another without grudging," says St. Peter. "Be given to hospitality," says St. Paul. The Hebrew Christians are to be careful to entertain strangers, remembering that some have thereby entertained angels unawares. A

bishop must be, besides other things, "given to hospitality," and Gaius seems to have excelled in this department of Christian practice. "Strangers," writes St. John to him—"strangers have witnessed of thy charity before the Church." It was the misery of Diotrefes that he did not understand the spirit of the life and the work of Gaius. But Gaius would never have been what he was but for the infinite charity which had taught him from the Cross that he did well to be his brother's keeper. And these are merely samples of what was going on all over the Apostolic Church; and when a few years had passed voluntary works of mercy were organised and developed after a fashion which recent research is beginning to appreciate, and which showed the world how vigorous, how operative was the truth which Cain had to learn, which our Lord came to teach—that every good man is his brother's keeper.

One of the distinguishing efforts of some literary men in the last century was the attempt to give a new and special prominence to a virtue which was treated almost as if it had been a new manufacture or discovery—the virtue of philanthropy; and two singular mistakes were made about it. Philanthropy was assumed to have reference only to the external and earthly life of man; and it was regarded as a virtue which had been created by modern philosophy. Now, if anything is historically certain, it is certain that philosophy—which, from time to time, has said very fine things about our duties to each other within certain limits—never created any such virtue among the people as philanthropy. Philanthropy was created at the foot of the Cross of Christ, and then it was patronised by the eighteenth-century philosophy. And this mistake about the origin of philanthropy was only less considerable than the other about its true range of operations. What is philanthropy but the love of man? Is that a true love of man which loves only his body and not his soul? Has philanthropy done its all or its best when it has built hospitals, when it has organised the relief of the poor, when it has advocated secular education, when it has generally promoted the temporal well-being of the people? How can such-like efforts exhaust the duties of philanthropy, unless, indeed, man be only a body, with perhaps an added endowment of transient and perishing intelligence—unless his body be the central seat of his life, the only feature of his being whereof a true love of him need take serious account?

The Obligations of Human Brotherhood. 11

Has philanthropy, then, nothing to say to the true, indestructible man, to the being who lives within and beyond the senses, to the being who still lives when disease has done its work and when the coffin has been nailed down? Surely a philanthropy that would deserve the name cannot exclude from its purview the most intimate essence, the true being, the higher nature of man—his undying personality, his soul. Certainly He who loved man better man than any other, the Divine Philanthropist—He did not do so. If He fed the hungry, He also bade men “labour, not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life.” If He healed the sick, He told men of those worse diseases of the soul which He also, and He alone, could heal. He told them of a life which would last when that which His wonder-working touch had re-invigorated should have passed away.

No doubt, my brethren, if there were no hereafter, if all really ended at death, there would be reason in confining our selves to provisions for the needs and to relieving the wants of this present life. It would be folly to spend time and money on unsubstantial creations of the fancy. They who deny the life after death are quite consistent in resenting the supreme importance which we Christians attach to preparation for it. But for any Christian who says with the Apostle, “We look not at the things which are seen, but to the things which are not seen, for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal,” it must be clear that the true philanthropy must devote its highest and most strenuous efforts to the soul of man—to its enlightenment by the knowledge of God, to its expansion through the love of God, to its elevation, to its invigoration, through conformity to the will of God. And how is this possible without the knowledge and love of Him who has bridged over the gulf that separated man from God, the one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus? How is it possible without the Divine Guide who has dared to say, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me”? How is it possible, apart from His faith, His words, His Church, His sacraments, if His Apostle is right in saying that “neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name given among men under heaven whereby we may be saved”?

As we, most of us, know, there are large and important questions profoundly affecting man's material well-being, which have, of late, interested thousands of people in this great city as they have never interested them before—questions as to the relation between labour and capital, between wealth and poverty, between social order and personal freedom, between the teaching of social experience and the ambitions of social hope ; and there is, indeed, a great deal to be said about the importance of these great questions—nay, they would be of the very highest importance if only human life ended at death ; but for us who know that it does not so end they are not the highest questions. It is, indeed, serious that in a great metropolis there should be so many thousands of able-bodied men out of work, so many thousands of children still uneducated or under-educated, such sharp contrasts as undeniably exist between our wealth and our poverty. No one can disguise the seriousness of these facts in themselves, or of the consequences to which they may possibly point ; but what is more serious is this, that in spite of all the religious agencies of all who own the Christian name in London, taken together, there are about us even hundreds of thousands of human beings without any true knowledge of that which it most concerns them to know, of the testing which awaits man beyond the grave, of the gracious and awful Being whom they will meet in judgment, of the Divine Saviour who has died that they may live for ever, of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies and guides the children of God, of the means of grace whereby the higher life is bestowed on and sustained in the soul of man. Surely, it is an overwhelming and most distressing fact that here in London, where the Church of Christ has been planted for these many centuries, there should be so many thousands who live and die as though they had no Creator, no Redeemer, no Sanctifier. Whose fault is it ?

My brethren, I have no wish to disguise shortcomings of which we, the ministers of the Church, may have been guilty heretofore, may be guilty now ; but, in the main, this great disaster is, as I believe, due to causes beyond human control. One of the greatest social facts of our time with which in this, as in other matters, we have and shall have to reckon is the concentration of the population in great centres, in towns, in

cities. This is not peculiar to England. It is going on all over the civilised world.

It is a product of many influences, of which, perhaps, the development of the railway system is the most operative. Under the influence of this cause London has grown more rapidly than any city in the Empire, probably than any city in the world. It is still growing at the rate of some forty-five thousand a year. In other words, every year a much larger population than that of Oxford is added to London: and the consequence is that, while the population of country parishes, for which ample religious provision has been made in past ages, is being in some parts of the country considerably reduced, the population of London is increased at a rate which has distanced the utmost efforts of the Church to keep pace with it, and it is impossible to contemplate the result without the gravest concern. It would be easy to show that a vast accumulation of human beings engaged in a hard struggle for existence, and neither encouraged by the hopes nor controlled by the apprehensions which are inseparable from belief in a future life, may be a serious danger to the State. But you are Christians, and it is better to dwell on the infinitely greater danger of immortal souls "having no hope and without God in the world." This is, alas! a literally true description of the case of tens of thousands of our fellow-citizens living within a radius of five miles of St. Paul's; and it appeals to us with a moral force which no human words could possibly enhance.

Now, the great enterprise which the chief pastor of this diocese desires to press on your attention to-day is worthy of the best support that you can afford to give. It is intended to deal, so far as it may, with this state of things. The Bishop of London's Fund is a sum of money raised by subscription with a view of enabling the Bishop to do what he may to overtake the ever-increasing mass of spiritual destitution in his enormous diocese. It is invested in the names of well-known laymen. It is administered under the Bishop by a large and representative committee. It is, in fact, a continuation at the present day of the bold and noble efforts to grapple with the heathenism of the metropolis which were made half a century ago by Bishop Blomfield, but it is distributed with regard to the greater variety and elasticity of religious work

and enterprise that is demanded by the circumstances of our time. It is expended in building and repairing churches, in mission-rooms, in schoolrooms, in supporting clergymen and lay agents of various descriptions. It encourages, in short, every kind of church agency that can promote the knowledge and the love of God among the people of the metropolis. It can point to a noble record of work already done, of funds impartially administered, and great and signal encouragement to the cause of religion in very difficult circumstances. But the memorable year 1887, which in various ways made large demands on the generosity of the public, has impoverished to a most serious extent this useful and indispensable servant of the Church in London. The sum raised by the Fund in 1887 is little more than two-thirds of the sum which was raised in 1886. It falls short in respect of donations and subscriptions by upwards of five thousand pounds; and this deficiency, if it be not redressed by a serious effort, means the retreat of religion from the ground already occupied. It means the abandonment of the ground to the forces of vice and infidelity. It means the withdrawal of clergymen and other religious teachers, the closing of mission-rooms, in districts where nothing else exists to tell our fellow-men that they have immortal souls, and that death and judgment are close at hand. If the sum raised in 1886 had been raised in 1887, it would still have been far below the actual requirements of the immense suburbs of the metropolis; but the question now before us is not whether the operations of the Fund shall be extended as the spiritual needs of London demand, but whether many most useful agencies for promoting Christian faith and life must not be forthwith abandoned. Brethren, surely this state of things is only to be known in order to rouse us Christians and Churchmen to serious efforts, and to sacrifices which they may rightfully demand at our hands. The days of great efforts for our Lord have not gone by. Only yesterday we were told that a princely-minded Churchman of Liverpool had offered to build for that great city the cathedral which it so greatly needs as a centre for Christian work and life; but the spiritual temple is more precious than the material, and it is the spiritual temple which is built up in London by the Bishop of London's Fund. If we are too infirm or too busy to take a personal

share in doing what we desire for our brethren, we can do something—nay much—by deputy, and here is our opportunity. If we have not come prepared to give more than a conventional coin which will cost some of us little or nothing, let us try to do something really generous, really conscientious, if not magnificent, when we go home. In many a conscience I would fain hope the Divine Spirit is whispering the question, “Where is Abel, thy brother? Where are all those souls made, like thee, for God; redeemed, like thee, by the blood of Christ, but lying in darkness and in the shadow of death through a neglect which thou mightest do something—it may be much—to repair?” Looking to the immense spiritual destitution of London which lies, like the corpse of the first victim of human selfishness, at our feet, we dare not say, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” We cannot forget that most gracious, most compassionate Saviour who died for all, who died for each one of ourselves, who died that “they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.”

DEATH AND ITS CONQUEST.*

“The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”—I COR. xv. 56, 57.

THE subject which occupied us last Sunday afternoon was the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian bondage considered as an anticipation of the deliverance of Christians from the bondage of sin and death. The temporal circumstances of God’s ancient people Israel in Egypt foreshadowed the spiritual circumstances of the true Israel of God, gathered out of all nations before its redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ. Pharaoh is an earthly counterpart of the invisible power of evil who rules in the spheres of sin and death, and Moses of a greater than any earthly deliverer, who saves his people from a worse than the Egyptian bondage. The brief time at our disposal made it impossible to pursue the subject into the recesses of its Christian application, and, therefore, to-day we

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may do well to take that department of the victory achieved by Jesus Christ to which attention is directed in the text: the victory over death. "Thanks be to God," exclaims the Apostle, "who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." To most Christians, or at any rate to most Church-people who have grown up and who have had their average share of the sorrows of life, these words can scarcely be less familiar than they are solemn. Besides its place among the proper lessons for Eastertide, the 15th chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians is associated with the saddest memories in our lives by its place in the Service for the Burial of the Dead. Men who never give much heed to Holy Scripture at other times listen wistfully for some message of hope or encouragement in those dark moments when they are parting with the body of one whom they have perhaps loved best on earth. And in this great discussion on the resurrection of the dead, the Apostle comes to their assistance as no uninspired teacher possibly could with hard arguments for the reason, with boundless vistas of glory and of beauty in the world to come, addressed to the imagination, with affectionate appeals which may touch the heart, with plain-speaking remonstrances addressed to the, in them perhaps, dormant sense of Christian duty. But among the many great sayings with which the passage abounds, none perhaps is more fitted to sink into, and to take possession of, the soul of man than the confident anticipation, or, rather, experience, of victory at its close: "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. Now, observe, first of all, the estimate of death which is taken for granted in the passage before us. Death is referred to as an enemy who is to be conquered. Indeed, the Apostle had said as much in an earlier verse. "The last enemy which shall be destroyed is death." Why, it may be asked, should death be an enemy? May not death be to many a man a friend, apart from all religious considerations? Is not this life, for thousands of human beings, a scene of anxiety and sorrow from which escape is welcome? Do not the statistics of suicide go to show that this view is taken by a large and increasing number of human beings, who feel so keenly the

miseries of life that they repress the strong instinct of self-preservation, and even, to quote their own desperate language, "dare to chance the awful future." My brethren, all this is unhappily true; but I submit that it does not control and set aside the broad fact that to the immense majority of human beings life is dear; and death, as the end and antagonist of life, is regarded as an enemy. This broad fact is not to be upset by the counsels and experiences whether of abnormal misery or of morbid despair. St. Paul's phrase is the phrase not merely of the Church, but of humanity; and it may be explained if we consider the effects of death. An enemy is one who will, if he can, spoil and wound us; and death seems to answer to this description.

(1) First of all, death separates us roughly and suddenly from the objects and persons round whom our affections have entwined themselves, and this separation is likely to be more felt the longer we live, until, perhaps, the years immediately preceding the close of a very long life. Elderly people, as distinct from the very old, whose faculties are more or less benumbed, and who are consciously tottering on the edge of the grave—elderly people, as a rule, feel more attachment to persons and objects around them than do the young, because in the young the affections have not yet had time to grow. A young man, it is true, gives up more of life when he dies voluntarily than does an older man, but he can do it, generally speaking, more easily, because his affections have not bound him like old ivy so tightly to the fabric of earthly interests with which he is in daily contact. Death, we cannot doubt it, inflicts a sharp wound on the life of affection in proportion to the intensity and fervour of the personal character.

Think of David and Absalom. Absalom was not only a rebel, he was a frivolous and worthless profligate, and he would have put his father to death without scruple if he had succeeded in his revolutionary enterprise. To Joab, who looked at the subject independently, who knew what was really at stake, and who, with his fellow-soldiers, had fought hard for David, David's sorrow for Absalom appeared to be an exhibition of sentimentalism with which he had no patience. But we, who are far removed from the passions of a desperate struggle for power, hear only that cry of anguish in the gate of Mahanaim: "O my son, Absalom, my son; my

son Absalom ! would God I had died for thee. O Absalom, my son, my son !” And as it falls upon the ear after traversing an interval of eight-and-twenty centuries, we reflect that a power like death, which can so deeply wound the human heart, is in the average judgment of human nature an enemy, even though he should be in time deemed and known and owned as doing the work of our one true friend.

(2) Then, again, looked at from the point of view of human nature death means the introduction of loneliness and exile. More than one here may perhaps remember what it was to go to school as a young child for the first time. A father or a mother came with us to the new scene in which we were to spend some years of life, and so long as they were still at hand it was possible to forget that we were leaving home. But the time came when they said good-bye, and then we were alone ; alone among strange faces ; alone in a new scene ; alone with new duties before us, with new habits to form ; alone, but with a memory, never, never so keen before, of all that we had left behind, of all whom we had loved, and from whom we now were parted !

How many will understand the account of one who went through this experience, and who tells us : “ As soon as I saw nobody was looking I slipped away into a bedroom and burst into tears ” ? That which proved too much for the nerve and heart of this young boy was the fresh and distressing sense of being alone, and the solitariness of the act of dying was that which most impressed itself on the mind of the great Paschal. “ I shall die,” he said, “ alone.” So it must be ; friends may be standing or kneeling around, tending us with every care that natural kindness or religious zeal can possibly suggest ; but the actual experience of dying, and of that which follows death, can be shared by no other, and until we go through it we cannot know or guess what it is exactly like. This only we do know—that it means a wrench from all that has hitherto been familiar. It means a plunge into the vast, dark, unknown world.

“ Alone, to land alone upon that shore,
With no one sight that we have seen before ;
Things of a different hue,
And sounds all strange and new—
No forms of earth for fancy to arrange,
But to begin alone that mighty change.

“ Alone, to land alone upon that shore,
Knowing full well we can return no more ;
No voice or face of friend,
None with us to attend
Our disembarking on that awful strand,
But to arrive alone in such a land.”

And thus death seems to human nature like some Assyrian or Babylonian conqueror hurrying his captives away from their homes and friends into a distant country, while their heart, as Isaiah has worded it, meditates terror. As we shall presently see, a Christian has much to sustain him under this anticipation. But from the point of view of mere nature, death is an enemy who leads us away from the persons and the objects which we know and love into the loneliness of an unimagined, of an unimaginable exile.

(3) And once more death inflicts a wound, the exact sensations of which we cannot anticipate upon this composite being, which hitherto is all that we have recognised as ourselves. True, when the body is laid aside and decays in the grave the immortal spirit survives ; but the spirit is only a part, though it be the most important part, of our complete identity. If death does not destroy man, it at least impairs and mutilates the integrity of his nature. To see, but without eyes ; to hear, but without ears ; to think, but without the brain ; to feel, but without the sympathetic action of the heart and the nerves, will be to have entered for the time being on a new existence. If we regard it as the act of an enemy violently to cut off an arm or a leg, even though he does not destroy life, it is intelligible that human nature should hold death to be an enemy when he achieves so much injury and mutilation of our being, when he breaks up and destroys the body altogether, although he cannot touch the surviving spiritual essence, which is the seat of the personal life.

(4) But, above all, death has one formidable peculiarity upon which the Apostle insists, while he passes over those which have been mentioned. Death, in his eyes, is like those reptiles which are armed with a sting. The sting of death is that which arrests his attention. What is it ? The sting of death is sin. Sin may be a source of great misery to a perfectly healthy man in whom conscience has not been killed, quite apart from the thought of death. Remorse, as even the

heathen knew, can be torture; the wrong which we have done to another and of which our victim never suspects us; the praise which we have received for some work or conduct which, if the truth were known, would be the measure of our discredit; the money which we have made by unfair or dishonourable means; the lie which we have told at a moment when it was socially convenient to tell it, which we have not dared since to own; the secret act which we would not for all the world have others suspect, yet which we cannot forget, since it has left a black stain upon our souls—some of us, perhaps, know what the sharp pain of a memory like this may possibly mean. Quite apart from the grave violations of God's moral law, we may be well conscious of a general habit of life which is sinful, in that it is not in accordance with what we know to be God's will—our waste of time, our waste of money, our purposelessness in what we do with ourselves, our frivolous conversation, our petty and enduring jealousies, our subjection to unworthy prejudices, to feeble irritability, the empire of states of thought and feeling which, like a blight or a frost, kill all that is tender and beautiful in life; the empire of unchaste imagination, the empire of unresisted sloth, the empire of vague desires for place and promotion, of lazy, unconfessed, unexamined, unverified doubt. We think little of these things taken separately, but in the aggregate they mean a life which is not in accordance with the Divine will, which in its bent, direction, spirit, and physiognomy is a sinful life; possibly no monstrous sin has yet disfigured it, no thoroughly deliberate lie, no flagrant adultery, but its general character is such that we shrink as with a pang from the thought of death; we feel that, if God is what we know Him to be, we ought to be radically different from what we are before we die. We strive to put the whole thing aside while we are in good health and spirits; for long tracts of time we even strive to do this when our health has given way, but we find means of giving a new turn to our thoughts. But these periods of pre-occupation with the perishable will not last for ever; they do come to an end.

Again we find ourselves face to face with the thought that we are going to die, and again we find that the sting of death is sin. What is it which makes this sting so sharp and so

venomous? What is the strength of sin? "The strength of sin," says St. Paul, "is the law." This is a point which St. Paul not seldom insists upon—the irritation which is produced by the holy and blessed law of God on man's fallen nature. When man lives in harmony with the will of God, as he did in his unfallen state, as he does substantially when he lives the regenerate life in Christ, and is renewed and led by His spirit, there is no opposition between God's moral law and man's nature; but with fallen and unreconciled man it is otherwise, and it is otherwise with Christians who by wilful sin have impaired or forfeited the grace of their regeneration at baptism. To such the moral law appears only as an outward rule, an unwelcome restraint upon all that it is natural to desire, and to do, and to be, a galling yoke which is inconsistent with the liberty of the passions, a continuous incentive and provocation to resistance. This is true, not merely of the moral law given through Moses, which St. Paul had more especially in view, but of all law whatever which can rightly in any sense appeal to conscience. Law, as such, is a standing provocation to resistance, until it is embraced voluntarily as a principle of life, until it expresses the bent and drift of the inmost will. In that great chapter, the eighth to the Romans, St. Paul teaches us how this perfect harmony between law and human nature is brought about by the guiding and ruling spirit of Christ; but until this blessed result is achieved, law acts upon our fallen nature as a constant incentive to rebellion, and thus it is the strength of sin. Putting himself into the position of a fallen man, St. Paul writes to the Romans, "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law, sin was dead. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me." And thus, in a sinful nature, sin is strengthened by the very presence and imperativeness of the rule of holiness, and this makes it for numbers of human beings the sting of death. This dreadful sting is extracted when the moral law is become, through supernatural grace, an inward principle, an instinct not to be distinguished from a man's average desire and will; but until this has been done

or when, through a lapse into wilful evil, it has been undone, the moral law cannot but be the strength of sin and the minister of its sharpest pang to the thought and the experience of death.

II. Now the first way in which our Lord enables us to conquer death is by dissipating our ignorance about it. Without the Gospel death and its surroundings are wrapt in a mysterious gloom. Two Sundays ago, indeed, we saw that reason may attain to a certain conviction that man survives death by reflecting that if the accepted doctrine of the conservation of force or energy is good for anything, it is as applicable to spiritual as to physical force, and that since physical force cannot exist apart from living persons or subjects, the conservation of spiritual force means the survival of personal life, which, however, without the resurrection of the body, is an incomplete survival of human identity. The criticisms which some hearers have since made to me on this statement deserve careful acknowledgment, but they do not appear to impair its substantial truth, and it is only referred to now as showing how far reason, if it be enterprising and morally well disposed, can grope its way upwards towards the light. But our Lord throws upon death, and all that follows it, a much brighter light than any that reason can suggest, or in any kindred way supply. He has, in very deed, brought life and immortality to light through His Gospel; and thus, to follow an illustration from modern warfare, he has enabled us to meet our enemy with all the advantages that are supplied by what is called an Intelligence Department. We know how, in the last great European war, eighteen years ago, the provision of a body of energetic, cultivated men devoted to obtaining, comparing, examining all the information that could possibly bear on the conduct of the campaign, was held to have had no slight influence in determining the actual result of that momentous struggle. And a believing Christian meets death having his soul furnished with an intelligence department. It is supplied with the most accurate information as to the limits of his enemy's power, as to the resources at his own disposal, as to the dangers which undoubtedly await him, and as to the bright and confident hopes which he may reasonably entertain. "Yes," it may be said; "but what if, in an age of doubt, some of us question the accuracy of some of the intelligence

which is thus supplied." Consider the credentials of your informant. He speaks not from conjecture, but on the strength of experience; His most important announcement is not a matter of theory or opinion, but a hard fact. If He assures us that our bodies will rise again, He points to the historically-attested fact that He himself has risen, and that the power which has raised Him will raise us. If, to use His own words, He tells us of heavenly things, it is because heaven has been, and is, His eternal home, and He speaks of what He knows. Not that the world of the departed, as He unveils it to us, is, all of it, sunshine; the destiny of those who die deliberately rejecting God is set before us not less clearly than that of the blessed; and the eternal things that are said on this awful subject fall from His own blessed lips. He would not leave to any of His servants the odium, if so it was to be, of proclaiming them. Altogether, since His coming among us, the world beyond the grave is sufficiently well known to Christians for all practical purposes—the intermediate state, the general resurrection, the last judgment, the two fixed conditions beyond, are facts on which we may calculate in our reckoning of the future. And yet more the measure of our weakness, the strength and deceitfulness of our enemy, the yet greater strength and larger wisdom of our true and only Friend—all this is certain too. It is certain enough for all who really wish to be convinced. Nothing is easier for a Christian than to relapse into a state of doubt. He has only to be careless about keeping his conscience in order, irregular in his habits of private prayer, unconcerned as to whether he communicates with a proper disposition, or receives the Holy Communion at all, indifferent to the claims of plain duty, idle, more or less perhaps dissipated, and doubts will come on him fast enough. But his doubt, having a moral and not an intellectual origin, will be no measure of the certainty which is really at his disposal. We may, if we will, know all that is necessary in order to meet death with resignation and courage, and by giving us this knowledge our Lord has made the first great step to giving us the victory over death, for, besides this, He has enabled us to overcome our shrinking from death which is so natural to human beings. As the Apostle says, He has delivered "them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Fear

of an impending evil may be the worst of bondages, and many men have had this fear of death in an exaggerated degree. It is, unhappily, not difficult for me to recall a highly cultivated man, who had lost his hold on Christian faith, and to whom the approach of death inspired nothing short of terror. Death was kept at bay as long as possible by all sorts of expedients,—relaxation of work, change of air, everything that medical science could suggest ; but at last it came near ; it came near as a darkness which he thought might be anything or nothing, but which in itself was horrible. This was nothing less or else than a relapse into a state of feeling common enough in the old pagan world from which Christ our Lord has delivered us. Go into a gallery of ancient funereal inscriptions in the Vatican at Rome or elsewhere, and note the hopelessness with which the old pagans take leave of those whom they have loved on earth—generally speaking, all the fear they know is that all is over for ever—and contrast this with the buoyant delight and joy of the inscriptions on the early Christian tombstones, radiant with hope as they are in the prospect of the coming resurrection. This is the measure of one element of the Christian's victory—he no longer fears death. At times, no doubt, Christians have looked forward to death even with rapture. Some of the early Christians were so enamoured of it that they put themselves in the way of becoming martyrs by defying the authorities of the old pagan empire. This sort of forward enthusiasm was not encouraged by the Early Church. To encounter death with calm courage when it came was one thing, to seek it by word or deed was quite another, but it surely showed at least how completely the old dread of it had passed away, and how thoroughly Christians had learned to think of death as the gate of life. Our Lord enables us to overcome the fear of dying by the conviction that He, crucified and risen, is, and will be, with us. Apart from His Divine presence, He supports us by the sympathy of His human nature, which makes Him so intimately our Brother and our Friend. When our human weakness shrinks at the thought of death, He comes to us with the authority of His personal experience—He, too, has died ; He has known the secrets of the grave ; He has grappled with all from which the nature that is common to Him and to us instinctively recoils, and

thus we do not, after all, die alone. No ; He has been there long before :—

“ . . . long has He waited on that shore,
For us who were to come
To our eternal home.
Oh, is He not the life-long Friend we know,
More privately than any friend below ? ”

And thus His voice reaches us as from the other world ; “ I am He liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death.” “ Fear not : for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name ; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.”

But the victory given through our Lord Jesus Christ over death will only be really complete when we do at last actually rise from the dead. Until then it is a victory more or less in anticipation ; it is a victory in hope, in temper, and spirit ; a victory such as that of a general who, being worsted for a moment in the field, will not despair his country. Until then, as a matter of hard fact, death is, within limits, the conqueror ; there is no denying his partial triumph, so long as the body moulders in the grave he may at least boast of having impaired the completeness of human life, of having planted his heel on one portion of our being, so long as the work of physical decomposition is not reversed. But when hereafter we rise from the dead, this limited victory of death, for such it is, will be at an end, since death will be expelled from the ground which he had thus temporarily occupied. “ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”

It was once my privilege to be present at the close of a Christian life which showed how clearly faith in the coming resurrection is bound up with real victory over the humiliation and pain involved in dying. It was clear that the end was very near, and as the sufferer had been greatly and deservedly beloved, some of those who were present were quite unable to control their expressions of distress. For some time there was

silence ; she was too weak, as it was thought, to speak at all, but the sight of those around her moved her to a last effort. "Why," she said, "should any of you feel as you do about me ? why cannot you feel with me ? The time is now come to which I have been looking forward for more than forty years, and we ought all to be thankful that it is come. I know that I am dying"—and here her voice became very subdued, but very clear and earnest : "I am dying in the sure and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change my poor vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself." She could say no more, she only expressed herself in very broken words during the short time that passed before death. But the calm triumph of those words produced a deep impression on all who were present. It was like a breath of invigorating air wafted across the centuries from the age of the Apostles unto this age of dull and enfeebled faith. But how may we hope to share in this blessed victory ? Not assuredly by trying to deem little that which no wise man can think of as other than extremely important ; not by steeling ourselves, should natural temperament lend itself to the process, into indifference to the inevitable. The victory of ignorance and the victory of moral obtuseness are like disastrous defeats. Nothing is gained by shutting out from view the tremendous experience that assuredly awaits each one of us at no distant day, nothing by attempting to preoccupy thought and imagination and memory and will with the perishing trivialities among which we pass our time. "Oh, turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity ; quicken Thou me in Thy way." But why should we fear to part from friends if it be only for a while ? Why should we dread the breaking up of this earthly tabernacle if all is to be restored hereafter ? One thing only need we dread, the sting of death, the sting which sin lodges in the conscience at the thought of meeting a perfectly holy God. Let us remember that the strength of sin is the moral law, and that the moral law ceases to be the strength of sin when it is forgotten, or vanquished, or dissipated, or defied ; when past transgressions of it have been pardoned through the precious blood of Him who is the great sacrifice for the sins

of the whole world, and when, by the action of the Holy and Eternal Spirit, the moral law has ceased to be an outward rule which constrains and condemns us through becoming an inward spirit in the light of the strength of which it is our happiness to live. "There is no condemnation for them which are in Christ Jesus, which walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit," because there is no longer in them the consciousness of an opposition between the will of the creature and the law of the Creator. The completion of this inward victory is the end of every true Christian life, and every sincere prayer, every Lenten act whereby faith and love grow in the soul, every true effort of obedience and self-denial, every good communion is a step towards it. And then, when the end comes, we, too, may hope to say, as tens of thousands of the redeemed have said before us: "The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore shall I lack nothing. He shall feed me in green pastures, and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort. He shall convert my soul, and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

AS OBEDIENT CHILDREN.*

"As obedient children."—I PETER i. 14.

IF St. Paul is the Apostle of the season of Epiphany, being, as he is, the great preacher of our Lord's manifestation of Himself to the heathen world, St. Peter seems to be the Apostle of the Easter season, or, at least, he divides this distinction with St. Paul. Both Apostles, indeed, dwell much on the Resurrection in their writings and in their public preaching; but St. Peter was the first apostle to whom our Lord showed himself after His resurrection, and St. Peter preached the first sermon in which the resurrection of Christ was put forward as the capital argument for the claims of the Christian faith. And as each Easter returns the genius of an

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, Sunday afternoon, April 22nd, 1888.

English composer associates for us the opening paragraph of St. Peter's first Epistle with the services of the season in this and other churches, and we are bidden contemplate that lively hope to which Christians are begotten again by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This idea of the Christian life as a new world or sphere in which hope is predominant, and into which, by virtue of our Lord's resurrection, Christians enter by a second birth, leads the Apostle to address Christians as children, and among the typical excellences of children he selects one as especially becoming and necessary—the virtue of obedience. They are to live as obedient children. And the instruction which St. Paul has just been giving the Ephesians and ourselves in the second lesson this afternoon applies St. Peter's general teaching to three classes of persons. "Wives," says St. Paul, "submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh." Not that wives, children, and servants are the only three classes of Christians who have to practise obedience to some one or other, in one capacity or another, at one time of life or another. We all of us have to learn to render the obedience of children. Let us consider what we may hope to learn from St. Peter's words.

I. Now, it may be noticed, first of all, that obedience is not in our day one of the more popular Christian graces or virtues. There are, it seems, fashions in morality as there are fashions in books and in dress, although, of course, moral truth itself, like all Christian truth, is, and must remain, ever the same. There have been days in the Church when men have been possessed of nothing short of a passion for putting themselves under rule sometimes, it must be granted, not being sufficiently careful as to the sort of rule that they put themselves under. Those days have gone by, and while we here have Church Temperance Societies and Church Purity Societies, with meetings and committees and secretaries, all devoted to the propagation and enforcement of these particular virtues, we do not as yet hear of a Church Obedience Society, and yet obedience is as much a Christian excellence as temperance or purity, and the comparative indifference to its claims which is observable is a feature of the time which it is well to

endeavour to account for. Now, the neglect into which obedience has fallen is apparently part of a larger neglect—that of the passive virtues generally; because although obedience has an active, sometimes a very active side, it is, in the main, a passive excellence. You will remember the great difference between the moral teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and that of the old pagan teachers of morality. It consists in the stress which our Lord lays on the passive virtues. In the old heathen world large classes of men had a sincere care for a certain sort of virtue, but they understood by virtue something active, productive, aggressive, robust. The passive virtues—humility, self-denial, self-repression, of which so much is made in the Gospels—would have appeared to an average old Roman gentleman very questionable virtues—the virtues of slaves or of degenerate and conquered races, rather than of men who, like himself and his fellows, could hold their heads high and direct the course of the world. The fruits of the Spirit as enumerated by St. Paul—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness—these would have seemed to a strong-willed, shrewd old heathen ill-adapted to the practical business of life, which he would have held to consist in doing the best that could be done to assert and to enrich the position of his family or his race, and to keep as many other people as possible in good order. And this old-world notion reappears in our own time whenever in classes of men, or in individuals, the faith and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ is losing its hold. As the soul loses touch with the great Master of love, humility, self-repression, obedience, it falls back on the old pagan idea of regulated self-assertion, and a virtue like that insisted on by St. Peter—childlike obedience—is apt to be very soon at a discount.

II. And besides the distaste for the passive virtues which is natural to ages and to races which have achieved material progress by cultivating a spirit of aggressive self-reliance, there is another characteristic of our time which makes obedience a more or less difficult virtue. We live in a democratic age—an age in which, whatever may be the external form of government in this or that country, the will of the great mass of the people goes for more than has ever before been the case with so large a portion of the human race, and the tendency of events is to make democracy a greater force in the future

than it is at present. It is not now my business to do more than take note of the fact. This is not the time or place to enter upon the question, whether upon the whole the progress of democracy is or is not for the real advantage of the great mass of human beings; but the point to which it is important to direct attention is that in the growth of democracy an excellence like obedience is likely, from the nature of the case, to fall into disrepute. Obedience is said to be the virtue of older social conditions, such as accompanied feudalism or absolute monarchy—older conditions to which democracy has succeeded. It was natural, we are reminded, for arbitrary rulers to make much of a temper of mind which buttressed their power, but in a democratic age liberty takes the place of obedience. Liberty is the typical virtue of free, self-improved, self-governed man. Obedience, as a virtue, has had its day. We are reminded that we live in an age of liberty.

III. Nor, thirdly, can it be denied that the difficulties of doing justice to the virtue of obedience have been aggravated by the abuses which have gathered round ancient centres of authority. Nothing discredits the claims of obedience like the exaggerations of the rightful claims of any who ought to be obeyed. The monarchy of France was the natural forerunner of the great Revolution. The Papacy, when, among other causes, the false decretals had exaggerated a legitimate primacy of order into a spiritual absolutism, led by reaction to that enfeeblement of Church authority which is the weakness of our part of Christendom. We have, accordingly, fallen upon times when both in Church and State the rights of liberty have been pleaded against the duties and the instincts of obedience, and pleaded more or less successfully, because of abuses in whose support obedience has been or might be conceivably enlisted.

IV. And, further, as the consequence of these three tendencies—the neglect of the passive virtues among the energetic modern races of the West, the steady growth of the democratic spirit, and the dread of supporting illicit forms of authority through insisting too much on the value of obedience—attention has been in modern times largely concentrated on those parts of Holy Scripture, to the neglect of others, which lay stress upon the rights, as distinct from the duties, of a Christian—upon his freedom from the Jewish law, as distinct from his obligations to the eternal moral law; upon the liberty with which Christ

has made him free, as distinct from that service which he owes to God, and which is itself perfect freedom. Liberty, rather than obedience, is the watchword of most of the modern religion among us—liberty to think as we please, rather than what St. Paul calls the obedience of faith; liberty to do and to be what we like, rather than the obedience of children which St. Paul would have us cultivate. It is impossible, my brethren, to mistake the charm and power which attach to this word “liberty.” There is, we feel, something in our common human nature which at once responds to it. It appeals to sympathies which are universal and profound. Liberty is itself in one particular sense the excellence of man as man—that is to say, of man as a being endowed with a free will. As man compares himself with the inanimate creation, and with the lower animals around him, he feels, he knows, that he is that which they are not; that is to say, he is a will, he is a conscience, not strictly controlled by nature or by instinct. The sense of this prerogative is the ground of human self-respect—of the respect which each man owes to himself and which he owes to others. To attempt to crush the exercise of this endowment of freedom is regarded as a crime against human nature, while the undertaking to strengthen its vigour and to enlarge its scope appeals to man’s profound desire to make the best of that which is his central self. And hence the indefinite, the magic charm which always attends upon the word and the idea of liberty. But when in this connection we use the word “liberty,” two different things are often intended. The liberty to choose between good and evil—with it, must be added, in our fallen state, an existing inclination in the direction of evil—is one thing; the true moral liberty of man is another. Man’s true liberty may be described as the unimpeded movement of his will towards God; but the only liberty with which many writers and speakers ever trouble themselves is liberty to choose between good and evil, as though we could not conceive of a liberty which did not include the choice of evil—as though the power of choosing evil was an integral element of real human liberty. Brethren, whatever we do, let us rid our minds of this miserable misconception; let us be sure that a man may be really free without being morally free to be a bad man. True liberty is secured when the will moves

freely within its true element, which is moral good. Moral good is to the human will what the air is to the bird, what the water is to the fish. Bird and fish have freedom enough in their respective elements. Water is death to the bird as the air is death to the fish. A bird can sometimes drown itself; a fish can leap out of the water and die upon the bank; but the liberty of fish and bird alike is sufficiently complete without this added capacity for self-destruction. And so it is with man. Moral good, the moral law of God, is the element within which the human will may safely find room for its utmost capacities of healthy exercise and invigoration; and when a man takes it into his head that his freedom is incomplete if it does not include a licence to do wrong, he is in a fair way to precipitate himself out of his true vital element, to enslave and ruin his will by doing so. Every Christian who is living in a state of grace will understand this. He knows that he would gain nothing in the way of moral freedom by a murder, or an adultery, or a lie. He knows that our Lord Jesus Christ, who did no sin, who could have done no sin, was not, therefore, other than morally free, since it is His freedom in giving Himself to death which is of the essence of His self-sacrifice for the sins of the world. "No man taketh My life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." Nay, a Christian knows, too, that God could not choose evil without doing violence to His essential nature. But is God therefore without moral freedom? Is not God rather the one Being who is perfectly free, because His perfections make it impossible for Him to choose evil? And would it not follow that the more closely man approaches to the holiness of God, the more closely does he approach to the true idea of liberty? As his will inclines more and more entirely towards God, so more and more impossible does it become for him to have any parleying or trafficking with evil, and yet so far is he from thereby forfeiting his freedom that, in the highest and divinest sense of the word, he then begins to realise it.

And then we see that the supposed hostility between freedom and obedience does not exist in fact, since true obedience does not proscribe liberty, and true liberty does not offer an outrage to obedience. Obedience guards the element or sphere of thoughts and words and acts—within

which alone true liberty is possible—a sphere beyond the frontiers of which there is liberty only for the enslavement or the death of a moral being, of a conscience, of a soul.

We may look at this fundamental truth from another side. The sense of liberty within the soul of man is the conscious energy of the will, its felt vigour, its power of making straight for the aim before it ; but, what is more certain than that, the will acquires its twofold excellence, strength and directness of purpose, by the discipline of obedience. The man who has never obeyed is not the man to know how to command. The steady drudgery of apprenticeship is a necessary training for the conduct of a great business. The submissive and persistent industry of the junior clerk is the true preparation for a partnership in the firm. He would be a poor general of division who had never served as an ensign or a lieutenant, if not in the ranks. He would be an indifferent admiral of the fleet who had never learned the duties of a midshipman. Nay, we see the operation of this law, that the strength and freedom of the will is secured by obedience, in the very quarter where we might beforehand perhaps think that it might have been dispensed with. We are told that the Divine Redemer of the world went down to Nazareth, and was subject to His mother and His foster-father until a period long past the age of manhood ; and when His ministerial life, which from first to last was a life of obedience, was ended, it was ended by a supreme act of obedience. “Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then, said I, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God ! . . . By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” “For He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross ; wherefore also God hath highly exalted Him.”

The obedience which St. Peter recommends is, let us observe, the obedience of children. It is not the obedience of slaves—of slaves who are slaves against their will. The kingdom of heaven is not fashioned on the lines of an Oriental court, in which a crowd of unwilling servitors tremble before a master whose word may at any moment bring to any one of them a sentence of death. There have been Christians who have understood the service of God in

some such sense as this, but it is not the tendency or danger of our time. We should perhaps do better to remember that the use which a true Christian makes of his freedom is to become willingly a slave of Jesus Christ. This is St. Paul's favourite way of describing himself, "Paul, a servant" (it should be "a slave") "of Jesus Christ." He means that he has freely surrendered himself—his soul, his body, his understanding, his affections, his will, his passions, his entire liberty—to the will, to the command, of Jesus Christ. But then this slavery is the highest expression of freedom, and it differs vitally from the involuntary slavery which has nothing to do with though it may have at times been mistaken for, Christian obedience. In the current sense of the words, Christian obedience is not the obedience of slaves, nor is it the obedience of mercenaries. A true Christian does not serve God for the sake of what he can get from Him. He does not serve God only, or chiefly even, for the sake of gaining heaven or of escaping hell. There have been Christians who have made this mistake, whose lives have been laid out so as to secure a future equivalent, or something more, for the efforts and sacrifices which have distinguished them here. This, too, is rather a mistake of our past days than of our own. It is a mistake of a robust, if of a misguided, faith; and, if the truth be told, much of our modern faith is too poor and feeble a thing to be ever liable to it. And yet we, too, may be in danger of something very like it, though perhaps we think no danger is less pressing than this. Perhaps some one here is thinking to himself: "How could we dream of paying a fee to get to heaven—we who know that we have been redeemed by Jesus Christ, that we are saved by grace, that at the best we are unprofitable servants, that finite efforts and an infinite reward cannot possibly have any relations of equivalence?" and yet may not our service, after all, be in its spirit something mercenary? May we not be looking out for a reward here, or, at least, disappointed if we do not receive one?—a reward of bright thoughts, of buoyant hopes, of spiritual enjoyments, of exceptional consolations, perhaps of spiritual ecstasies, sustained assurance, unclouded love, joy, and peace in believing; and if these things are not granted, may we not be murmuring against the good Master who has given us less than He has given to others who, as we may think, have served

Him much less ardently than we? But here do not let us exaggerate. If God is to be served because He is what He is, infinitely perfect and lovable, it is not less true that a recompense does follow all Christian obedience. The picture in the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, of the King sitting in judgment and making the eternal awards to the blessed and to the lost, is not an illusion. If the recompense be not the first motive of service, it is a motive which our Lord Himself has sanctioned, considering, as He does, in His indulgence, what human nature requires and what it can do. Nay, in the last resort, obedience to God for His own sake, and obedience for the sake of the reward which He gives, so blend as not to be distinguishable from each other. Since God Himself is the only true and adequate reward of the human soul, He says to each true servant now, as He said to the patriarch, "I will be thy exceeding great reward." And yet it remains true that the obedience which keeps an eye only, or mainly, on what it will get is not in keeping with the highest temper of the Christian life. St. Peter would have us render to God neither the obedience of mercenaries nor the obedience of slaves. His word of order is "as obedient children." No title of Christians should be more precious than that of a child of God. It belongs to us as being made members of Jesus Christ, God's true Son, and it was, as we know from the earliest lessons which we received in our Catechism, in our baptism that we were made "members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven." As St. Paul says, "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." This new and blessed relation to God may or may not have since been forfeited by wilful and unrepented sin, but St. Peter assumes the best about those to whom he writes. They are, he will hope, still God's children, and he would have them remember what the title should suggest. That title of high distinction suggests a great deal—trust in and dependence upon God, unaffected reverence for God, tender love of God, but above all it suggests obedience. Every time that we say "Our Father" at the beginning of the most authoritative and prevailing of all prayers, we bind ourselves to a life of obedience. At some time in their lives the best Christians have known the temptation to disobey—to say, with the rebels of the prophetic age, "I will not serve."

Many are the forces which whisper invitations to rebellion. At one time it is the imagination which, stimulated, perhaps, by some worthless work of fiction, has conceived some bold dream of wild adventure; at another, the reason, which jauntily presumes that it is above truth, and not below it; at another, some insurgent passion, which suddenly presents itself as a wild beast which must be gratified; at another, the will which, in a moment of madness, would throw off any check or control. And then comes great impatience of the yoke of Christ and the obligations involved in being a Christian; of the whispers, the protests, solicitations of conscience, of the thought of Calvary and the great sacrifice in the midst of much that is so little in harmony with it; and then a man is tempted to wish that he too, like others, should have his share in the lust of the flesh, and in the lust of the eye, and in the pride of life; to wish that he could throw himself for a week or for a day into the life of the world without being conscious of its hollowness; to wish—oh, it is a dreadful wish!—that God had left him, if not uncreated, at least unredeemed, unsanctified. They may be transient, these moments in a Christian life, but they are as dangerous as they are dreadful. They may issue only too easily into a rebellion against God, which shall be deliberate and lasting, but they are likely at least to result in an unfeebled and half-hearted obedience—obedience which loves to choose and see its path—obedience which would obey in its own way rather than in God's—obedience which would postpone the most obvious and imperative duties to distant or imaginary duties—obedience which would gratify self-will under the guise and cover of obeying the will of God—obedience which listens to the whispers of a vagrant imagination or of a deceitful heart, as if they were quite certainly the inspirations of heaven, and, withal, perhaps ignores the most plain and certain of moral and natural duties. Of this let us be sure—that no true obedience neglects orders and duties which God has clearly prescribed. If God says, by His Apostle, "Pray—" even "pray without ceasing"—true obedience does not say, "My heart is cold; my prayer may be formal, lifeless, resultless." It does its best. If God says, "In everything give thanks," true obedience does not say, "God knows all about me, and He will take my thankfulness for granted. I need not

say grace after meals, or thanksgiving after Communion, or go out of my way to render praise to Him for some special deliverances and mercies." It does its best. If God says of the sacrament of His love, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you : this do in remembrance of Me," true obedience does not say, "In a really spiritual religion we can dispense altogether with rites of this kind. We are saved, if at all, by intellectual processes internal to our own minds." No, it cries with the centurion, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under the roof of my soul," and it does its best. And if God bestows on us the treasure of His Holy Word and bids us search the Scriptures, true obedience does not say that the Bible will not help us until we are roused by a literary curiosity or some other sort of eagerness to read it. It resolves to train the spiritual taste by earnest daily study. It does its best. If God desires us again and again to bear witness before the world to the faith that is in us, true obedience does not dwell on the feeble hold on the great unseen realities, which is all that as yet we have—on the danger of saying more than we feel or mean—on the shifting, uncertain character of our present impressions. It goes straight to Holy Scripture and to the creeds, and it does its best. If God bids us remember the poor, visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction—in other words, look after hospitals, orphanages, homes, penitentiaries, deserted children, tramps, lone women, and the like—true obedience does not say, "There is no knowing, after all, how many of these institutions are doing any real good." It does not say, "We cannot possibly decide how many of these poor people are not gross impostors." It goes to work with the love of God in its heart, expecting to make a full percentage of mistakes, and it does its best. Obedience cannot hope to be always and everywhere the product of a sustained enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is a great gift of God, which visits souls and visits churches at intervals. But there are also intervals when there is little or no enthusiasm abroad, but during which the persistence of obedience is not the less necessary ; and it is during these colder periods that we learn the value of living by rule. Lives which are ungoverned by rule are as lacking in vigour and consistency as they are in discipline.

Days and weeks alternate between hard and conscientious work and hopeless lassitude and idleness. One, while prayer is regular, occupations pressing and useful, the poor looked after; another, while prayer is neglected, nothing is done that will last when the time has gone, the poor and the suffering are forgotten. No obedience worth anything is to be secured without rule. Moral force, it has well been said, is like running water in a narrow channel which confines it on this side and on that. It rushes onward towards the fields of duties as the dispenser of fertility and of life. But if it has no barriers to confine its energies and to direct its course it will presently sink away into the sands, and will do no good to any living thing. Not that childlike obedience is always, or, indeed, chiefly, active. In the majority of human lives it is passive. It consists in acceptance of what is ordered, in submission, in resignation, rather than in anything demonstrative; and obedience of this kind is at once harder and more sublime than active obedience. It is the obedience of Gethsemane and of Calvary, rather than that of the preceding years of labour and of miracle. The Holiest, we are told, Himself learnt obedience, not by the things which He did, but by the things which He suffered. Many men find it difficult to understand that God can be obeyed at all if they are not constantly moving about, talking, working outwardly for Him. To be doing nothing, to lie upon a bed of suffering, seems to them to be a condemnation to pure idleness, an enforced disobedience to the law of the Creator. They little think of the true seat of all disobedience, the secret recesses of the soul and the will, where perfect submission to the rule of right is infinitely more precious than any outward energy of the feet, or of the hands, or of the mouth. They little heed the truth that in the great universe of souls all cannot, consistently with the laws of order, be perpetually on the move at once, and that they also serve who stand and wait. They forget that in Christendom the greatest distinction which our heavenly Father's love often puts upon a human life is that of pre-eminence in suffering,—that, at any rate, “whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth,” but that this eminent distinction cannot be supposed to set aside the law of obedience, but only to give it a new and higher direction

and sphere. Moses may stand on the hill apart from the great struggle with Amalek, while his hands are sustained by Aaron and by Hur ; but, depend on it, he does not contribute less to the coming victory than do the sturdy warriors who are doing battle with the foe in the plain beneath. The best and most fruitful obedience may, in some cases, be that of the confirmed invalid, that of the closing weeks of a last illness. We may welcome this conviction, especially just now, when death of late has been unwontedly busy, and when, perhaps, some of us are thinking that to ascend the first throne of Europe only, as it might be feared, to lie down to die, is to enact a public rehearsal of suffering without any countervailing advantage. It may well be that an example of submission to the Divine will, heightened by a devotion to duty which apparently grows more earnest as vital strength is failing, may do more for the moral education of our generation than could even have been achieved by a long reign, marked, I do not say by brilliant military achievements, but even by large efforts of far-sighted political wisdom and of practical benevolence. May God help us to know by experience the happiness of obeying Him in the teaching of His Church and of His Word, in the shadow of His august authority which rests on earthly parents and on civil governments and on Church rulers and on all who, being wise and good, most resemble Him among men. Obedience is the joy and glory of the great intelligences who move and worship around the eternal throne ; and here below on earth the souls which grace has fashioned after the likeness of the Pattern-Man—ay, the finest natures among us have a thirst, nay, have a passion, for obedience ; for they know that in freely obeying they catch nearly, or quite, the secret of moral victory and spiritual joy. “If my delight had not been Thy law : I should have perished in my trouble. I will never forget Thy commandments : for with them Thou hast quickened me. I am Thine, oh, save me : for I have sought Thy commandments ! . . . I see that all things come to an end, but Thy commandment is exceeding broad.”

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE UNIVERSAL JUDGE.*

"Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me : it is high, I cannot attain unto it."—PSALM cxxxix. 6.

THE solemn subject of the universal judgment leads us naturally to think of Advent Sunday, of the Universal Judge, and of His capacity for judging us and all mankind. If we had to take our trial before the tribunal of an earthly judge there are probably three questions which we should ask ourselves with no little anxiety : Has the judge himself the power, or does he represent some one who has the power, to enforce the sentence which he may pronounce ? Is the judge a man of that integrity of character which is fearless when interpreting the plain sense of the law that is to be administered, and equitable when some indistinctness in that law obliges the interpreter to fall back on his own sense of what is probably right ? And can the judge command the means of knowing enough of those facts upon which his decision must be based to judge righteous judgment, to have himself and to inspire others with the assurance that innocence is acquitted and that guilt is punished ? When we turn our thoughts upwards to the Judge of all men, we know how a serious believer in God must answer such questions as these. There are no limits to His power save those which are imposed upon Him by His own perfections. He cannot contradict Himself, and therefore He cannot do anything which is inconsistent with His truth, with His justice, with His righteousness. But barring this, His power is unlimited. No other being exists who can arrest His arm, or can prescribe to Him a frontier outside which He may not work His will, and hence it follows that from His sentence there is no refuge or escape. Its operation is inevitable.

And His righteousness is, for serious believers in God, as certain as His power. Power or intelligence, apart from goodness, even though they should be infinite, would not be God. God's righteousness, His moral nature, is His essential being. We cannot too often remind ourselves that God's moral law is not a scheme of conduct which He has framed for us, His

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creatures, and which might have been other than what it is. It is the expression on this little scene of human life, and in the weak accents of human language, of God's essential nature; and, therefore, when this law is made the standard by which the conduct of His reasonable creatures on their probation is to be measured, it may be true that, judged by such a standard alone, no man living shall be justified; but it is also true that the law is in itself holy and just and good, and that in its administration justice can run no risks whatever through any failure to administer it equitably on the part of the Judge.

And, once more, God possesses knowledge of such a kind and extent as to make it impossible that He should ever err in judgment through lack of necessary information.

This department of the subject is suggested to us by the author of the 139th Psalm—a psalm which, perhaps, places the human soul more directly face to face with the All-knowing God than any other portion of the Bible. “O God, Thou hast searched me out, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thoughts long before. Thou art about my path and about my feet, and spiest out all my ways. For, lo! there is not a word in my tongue but Thou, O God, knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful, too excellent for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.” It is obvious that we can know little in detail of such a subject as the knowledge that belongs to the Infinite Mind, except that which He whose mind it is may have condescended, either directly or by implication, to tell us. The mere belief in His existence of itself carries us a considerable way. We cannot conceive of a supreme and perfect Being, the Author and the Upholder of all things visible and invisible, apart from an intelligence so comprehensive in its grasp, so incessant yet so tranquil in its activity, so raised above the risks of error and illusion, as to render vain and fruitless any efforts that we could possibly make to measure it. That such a mind does exist we are certain. It is an integral part of the supreme certainty, the existence of God, and accordingly Holy Scripture, while sometimes stating explicitly, as by the mouth of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, that “The Lord is a God of Knowledge,

and by Him actions are weighed," more commonly takes this truth for granted, as obvious to all serious believers in God, and a subject rather for adoring contemplation than for speculation or for argument, as when the Apostle exclaims in ecstasy, "Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God!"

But as we look more closely at the subject, certain features of the knowledge which is possessed by the Divine Mind stand out before us more distinctly. They show how that knowledge differs from knowledge as it exists in ourselves, and they enable us to understand how the knowledge which belongs to God as God is knowledge of an extent and of a kind which make it certain that when seated on the throne of judgment, the Holy Judge of all the earth does right.

And first of all, then, so far as we know, all or nearly all of our knowledge is acquired, and most of it is acquired at very considerable cost of time and labour. We may pass by the opinion that every child is born into the world with a certain stock of innate ideas, because although this opinion has a great deal to say for itself, and can appeal to the sanction of great names, it cannot be treated as a certainty which is beyond discussion. Practically, at the very least, the whole of our knowledge is acquired knowledge. Long years of toil and discipline have alone enabled us to master it—that is to say, if we have any real knowledge at all; and when the acquisition is made we look back, perhaps, upon the successive efforts which it has cost us, just as the Alpine climber stops to survey first this and then that terrace, or valley, or cone, or ridge which he has surmounted in order to reach the point on which for the moment he stands. Thence he reviews, not merely his achievements, but his mistakes, the wrong turns which he has taken, the precipice which he has attempted to scale, and the flank of which after all he had to turn, the unnecessary length of the ascent by which he has reached this or that point of his route which he might easily have attained, the scene of his own narrow escape or of a past catastrophe of which his guides have told him. So it is with the acquisition of real knowledge by the mind of man. It is gradual, laborious, painful; it is effected at the cost of failures and of disappointments as well as of perseverance and effort, and the joy we feel in possessing it, and the value we set on it, is generally

proportionate to the effort which its acquisition has exacted on us.

Now, nothing corresponding to this can hold good of the mind of God. God does not acquire His knowledge ; He ever possesses it. Acquisition implies ignorance to begin with ; it implies a limited prospect which is gradually enlarged by effort ; it implies dependence upon intermediate sources of knowledge, upon books, teachers, the testimony of others, evidence, experiment. All this is inadmissible in conceiving of the Divine Mind which never could have been ignorant, never dependent upon anything or any person external to itself for obtaining information. Man may be very—nay, utterly—ignorant ; not, indeed, without grave loss, but certainly without forfeiting his manhood. In man, knowledge, however important, is yet an accident of his life ; it is conceivably separated from it. In God, on the other hand, knowledge is not a separable accident, a dispensable attribute of His existence. As God, He cannot but know a thing on an infinite scale. In God, as St. Augustine finely says, to know is the same thing as to exist. He knows what He knows because He is what He is. He knows everlastingly, and by a single, unbegun, unending glance of His mind, all that He knows. There can be in Him no progress from a lower to a higher plane of knowledge, still less from ignorance to knowledge. In Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge have ever been exactly what they are.

Now, consider how this bears on the duties of a judge. A human judge, whatever his knowledge of the statute book, whatever his experience of proceedings in the courts, is dependent upon the evidence which is brought before him, when charging the jury or when forming his own judgment. If the evidence is confused or imperfect, if it is perjured or untrustworthy, still it is all he has to go upon ; he must do the best he can with it ; he has no means of arriving at a bound at the truth of the facts independently of that which is deposed to before him. Alas ! however excellent his intentions, however absolute his integrity, he cannot escape a liability—the human liability—to make mistakes. And so it happens that in a country like ours, where justice is probably administered more conscientiously and more efficiently than in any other in the world, we do hear at

rare intervals of sentences to penal servitude which the subsequent confession of the real criminal proves to have been undeserved, and of acquittals which, however technically inevitable, some later revelation or confession of crime shows to have been mistaken.

In the Divine Judge this liability does not exist, because His knowledge of facts, not being acquired by weighing evidence, is ever and immediately present to His mind. He sees everything—men, events, characters—at a glance, and as they are. There is nothing for Him to learn by investigation; there is no possibility of obscuring His penetrating survey by ingenious argument. If the Psalmist speaks of God's searching him out, this is not a difficult, gradual, uncertain process. It is the gaze of the Eternal Eye viewed from its human side. Saint and sinner alike must own before the great tribunal: "Thou, God, seest me."

And as human knowledge is acquired, so it is liable to decompose in our minds. It is less easily acquired than it is forgotten. As we have acquired it by the use of the mental faculties which our Maker has given us, so upon the vigour and tenacity of those faculties does our power of retaining it depend. A day comes to all, if life last long enough, when memory gives way, when first one and then another district of knowledge so painfully mastered becomes first of all indistinct, then obscure, then almost a blank, until at last it disappears altogether. That this may be due to the weakness of the body or of the brain, and that what is thus lost before death may be recovered by the spirit when emancipated from its earthly coil, does not, if it be true, affect the fact of the decay of knowledge. It is, indeed, a matter of experience that as human knowledge is gradually acquired, so it is liable to be gradually lost.

Here, again, we must see that nothing corresponding to this process, so familiar in the experience of the human mind, is even imaginable in the mind of God. Of that mind, as of Him whose mind it is, we may say, with the Apostle, that it knows "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." It is beyond all change, whether the change involved in the acquisition of knowledge or the change attached to the failure of memory. All that is, all that might have been and is not, all that might yet be, whether it is to be

or is not to be, is eternally present to it, and it could not forfeit its hold upon any part of this to us inconceivably vast field of knowledge without ceasing to be itself. And here, again, the Divine Judge must differ from any human judge. No human judge can prudently trust his memory even to retain what is brought before him in a case that lasts but a few hours; he can only trust his notes. Memory, he knows, is treacherous; it gives way just when we need it most; it refuses to recall a date, a name, a figure, a fact, unimportant generally, but of critical importance then and now. Its impotence is, so we think, as capricious as are its good services. In the Awful Mind above and around us nothing like this is possible, because It does not ever, as we do, look back upon any fact as upon something past; It is always in contact with all facts, whether, from our point of view, they be past or present or future, as eternally present to It. All that has been, is, or can be has a place in that Mind corresponding to, or rather, identical with, the fact, and so the Supreme Judge needs neither counsel, nor notes, nor witnesses; all alike before Him remains, lying before Him as it happens, as it will happen, indelibly traced on the eternal tablets.

And, once more, human knowledge is very limited. As the Apostle has said, "we know in part." As the generations of men who devote themselves to the work of marshalling and increasing the stock of human knowledge succeed each other, each generation is largely occupied in showing how defective was the knowledge of those who immediately preceded it, while it knows that in turn it, too, will be exposed to a like criticism on the part of its successors. So far are we men from possessing the field of universal knowledge that a man never entirely masters any single subject. Something in it ever escapes the most persevering industry, the most searching inquiry, the most penetrating insight that the human mind can bring to bear upon it; and those men who have known most and have also been most conscious of the very limited nature of all our knowledge, have spoken of it as being at its best insignificance when compared with that which is not and cannot here be known by us; and point as well to our ignorance of what is minute and trifling as to our ignorance of what is important and immense. The topic is, in fact, a commonplace which only needs to be insisted on again and

again, because from time to time, in moments of mistaken self-confidence or of unthinking enthusiasm, we are all of us tempted so entirely to forget it as to speak as though nothing in the world were less true.

In the Divine Mind, on the contrary, we cannot conceive partial knowledge of any subject whatever. Partial knowledge would imply a certain limitation of the infinite intelligence, and before Him are spread out in their entirety the two worlds of which human science is ever endeavouring to possess itself—the world of matter and the world of mind. God knows all, because He is everywhere. The Omnipresent cannot but be also omniscient. Observe in the Psalm before us how intimate is the connection between the two attributes. After exclaiming, "Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me, I cannot attain unto it!" the Psalmist proceeds, "If I climb up into heaven; Thou art there; if I go down into hell, Thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say: Peradventure the darkness shall cover me, then shall my night be turned into day; yea, the darkness is no darkness to Thee, but the night is as clear as the day. The darkness and the light to Thee are both alike."

What need is there to say that the knowledge of the human judge is, I will not say partial, but very limited indeed? Were it otherwise, how superfluous would be the machinery which now justice adopts in order to achieve its ends. Were it otherwise we should not now be asking, with a sad conviction that the question is not likely to be answered, "Who is the author of the series of fiendish crimes that during the past autumn has startled London, England, Europe?" We should not be blaming the police for not achieving the impossible, or falling back with something like despair upon a sense of impotence, as we look on the world of fact which, with all the appliances and resources of our civilisation, is really open to us.

How different with the Divine Judge! He knows at this moment all that we would fain know about those tragedies in Whitechapel; He can gain nothing from any external source of knowledge, and nothing can intercept or divert His

all-surveying, all-penetrating, all-comprehending intelligence. "O God, Thou hast searched me out and known me;" but "such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me, I cannot attain unto it."

Of this knowledge possessed by God there are some features which, from their bearing on life and conduct, deserve special attention. Thus God knows not only what is known to the world, or to our relations about each one of us; He knows that which each of us only knows about himself. His eye surveys our secret thoughts and words and ways. He has sometimes revealed this knowledge through the mouth of an inspired servant, as when Elisha discovered his double-dealing with Naaman to the astonished Gehazi, or when St. Peter proclaimed their crime and its punishment to the terrified Ananias and Sapphira. He Himself described the deep shame of her home life to the woman of Samaria when she supposed herself to be talking with a stranger who knew no more about her than she chose to tell him. He Himself proclaimed to the onlookers who did not know the true character of the widow's gift who cast her two mites into the treasury. Thus it is now as He surveys each of us here on earth, living, thinking, talking, acting beneath His eye, encompassed by His being, and thus He will excuse when man condemns, and thus He will condemn when man excuses, and will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.

And He knows, too, not only our acts, but our motives. We often do not know them really ourselves. In nothing is self-love more active or more successful than in blinding us to the springs of action which really govern our lives. We may be pretty sure that the young man in the Gospel satisfied himself that he had much more respectable reasons than his great possessions for going away from the Divine Teacher; and that Demas left Rome for Thessalonica never dreaming that love for this world was his real reason for deserting the Apostle in his extremity; and that Judas was persuaded that the thirty pieces of silver had little to do with determining him to act the traitor's part. He was actuated, no doubt, by a large view of the public interest, which led him very reluctantly to undertake the most unwelcome duty. Nothing is more singular than the drapery of plausible motive in which the

great wrongdoers of history have constantly and not seldom gracefully arrayed themselves. And it is not always otherwise with you and with us who do not belong to history. What we have to remember is that the true motives of our acts are just as much open to the eye of God as are the acts themselves, and that much more than the acts themselves determine His judgment about us.

And He knows, too, the exact measure of our individual responsibility for the corporate acts of the societies to which we belong—the Church, the nation, the parish, the family. It is so difficult, often so impossible, for man to assign the exact amount of responsibility to each of the individuals who have directly or indirectly concurred in some corporate action, when each man is perhaps only one of several millions who have acted in concert with various degrees of intelligence, that the attempt is commonly given up altogether. We persuade ourselves that the responsibility of each man is so small a fraction of the total responsibility that individual responsibility has practically evaporated, and that we need not trouble ourselves about it; and yet the fact remains that corporations, whether sacred or secular, do perform acts which are either right or wrong, and that somebody must be responsible for such acts. And that sense of corporation has no existence apart from the individuals who compose it. Those individuals, however numerous or however obscure, must be, in whatever degree, the responsible persons. The Bible throughout treats this principle as beyond discussion. Nations, cities, churches, are treated as moral agents for whose corporate acts each one of their members is in some degree answerable. But then comes the tremendous question, Who is to decide with unerring accuracy the exact amount of responsibility which belongs to each member consisting of thousands or millions of people? Only one Mind is equal to that overwhelming task, but He is equal to it. It costs Him no effort. He sees at a glance what no calculations on our part could possibly determine.

And, once more, He knows what each one of us would be in other circumstances than those with which He has surrounded us. We constantly speak as though we, too, possessed this sort of knowledge. Yet do we? Can we really know anything whatever on such a subject? How much circumstances contribute to make our lives and actions what they are can

The Knowledge of the Universal Judge. 49

only be decided if we can measure accurately the pressure of such circumstances on the one hand, and the force and vigour of our own characters on the other. This is implied in the old Greek proverb that leadership shows what a man really is, meaning that it obliges him to reveal what is or is not in him, and that he might escape this revelation in a private station; and in that saying of a Roman historian that in the judgment of the world Galba would have been deemed fit to be emperor if only he had never been one.

Now, our Lord, revealing the Divine Mind, claims to possess this knowledge in His comparison between Chorazin and Bethsaida and Tyre and Sidon. Tyre and Sidon had their full share of the degradations which in all ages of history have been the curse of seaport towns, and their religion, instead of doing anything to raise them, was of a character still further to degrade and brutalise them. The Phœnician worship of Nature in the form which it took in those ancient cities was little better than a prolonged, though disguised, appeal to the worst appetites of cruelty and lust; and yet as our Lord surveyed the towns in or near the brink of the Sea of Galilee, Chorazin and Bethsaida, and considered how in them, as the ruins of the synagogue of Chorazin attest at this hour, the worship of the true God was splendidly provided for, and how again and again each of them had listened to His teaching, and had witnessed His miracles, He uttered one of the most startling judgments in the Gospel. If the degraded pagans of the Phœnician seaboard had only had the advantages of the favoured Galilean towns they would long ago have turned with deep heart-searching penitence to God. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida, for if the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they had repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." The Divine Speaker knew what we could not know. He knows whether you or I should do better or worse than we do if we were placed by Him in other than our present circumstances. He knows this because He sees our inmost dispositions, and sees us as we are.

Yes, in thinking of the judgment we have to think not only of the power, not only of the goodness, of the Judge, but of His limitless knowledge—that awful attribute of knowledge which searches us out in the depths of our being, which plays

upon us, around us, within us, every moment of our lives with a penetrating scrutiny that nothing can elude; that knowledge before which the night is as the day, and the future as the present, and the possible as the actual, and the secret things of darkness as the most ordinary facts of daylight; that knowledge which nothing can impair, nothing can disturb, nothing can exaggerate or discolour; the calm, majestic, resistless outlook of the Eternal Mind, will become real to us—real to you and to me—as never before in our experience. It will be no longer an abstract and intangible attribute: it will be set before our eyes in human form, and He in Whom it dwells, and in Whom are hidden, as we know, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, will be looking at us, looking through and through us, and we, too, shall look on Him, on the wounds which our sins may have widened, on the sacred face which was once buffeted and spat upon for us; and as we look we shall know that He sees us as we are, and that His knowledge—too wonderful and excellent for us, yet infallibly exact—is our real judge.

There are two resolutions which the thought of that meeting should surely suggest. The first resolution, if we can, to know something really about ourselves before we die, to dwell no longer, if hitherto we have so dwelt, on the surface of life, to see ourselves with eyes not of our friends, not of our ignorance, not of our own self-love, but, so far as may be, as the holy angels see us, as He sees us who is the Lord of angels, our Maker and our Judge. Each day some few minutes should surely be spent in the regular and fruitful practice of self-examination—that practice which, more than any other, tells us how we stand with God, makes us and keeps us humble, gives force, gives motive to prayer, enables us to look forward to death and to the last great day at least without apprehension of a terrible surprise.

And the second resolution is to apply for refuge to that one Friend who can make a true knowledge of self bearable to each of us. "Come unto Me," He says, "ye that are weary and heavy laden at the discovery of what is really yourself, and I will refresh you." "This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus come into the world to save sinners." "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our

sins." "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." His holy incarnation, His birth of a virgin mother, His fasting and temptation, His life of tears and pain, His cross and passion, His precious death, the full value of which is illuminated by His resurrection from the grave and by His ascension to the right hand of the Father—these are facts which make it possible for us poor sinners to look deep into the recesses of our souls, to unravel one by one the weaknesses and the basenesses of our characters, to cast up long arrears of secret offences against light and knowledge, even while we know that the All-seeing Eye is upon us, and that we cannot, if we would, escape His audit. We can dare to be true not only because our Redeemer and our God is Himself the faithful and true, but because He is the All-merciful, because, if we so will, He has searched us out and known us even here, that at the last great day He may make us trophies not of His awful justice, but of His redeeming grace.

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF THE DIVINE LAW.*

"I am as glad of Thy word as one that findeth great spoils."—PSALM cxix. 162.

TO-DAY the Church guides us to think of the Bible, and of the Bible as preparing us for the second coming of our Lord. In the Epistle St. Paul teaches the Roman Church that whatsoever had been written in the Jewish Scriptures was written for the learning of Christians, and was especially intended to make them patient and hopeful. And the Collect extends what St. Paul says about the Old Testament to all Holy Scriptures, thus including the New. It leads us to pray that we may so hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Scriptures, that the object which the Apostle has at heart may be secured, that by patience and comfort of God's Holy Word we may embrace and hold fast the hope of everlasting life.

The passage which is before us takes us back to a date more

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than six centuries before that of St. Paul, and to a Psalmist, whether he was Ezra or some less known person, who was an exile in Babylon. The burden of his song is the preciousness of the Divine Law, of which it had been for so many centuries the boast and the glory of Israel to know and to guard. Exile as the Psalmist is, he has with him a copy of the Sacred Law, the Five Books of Moses, and it is for him a priceless possession, and enables him to bear with tranquil courage the trials and the sufferings of his lot. This exile was probably a poor Jew, sustaining life by a humble trade in the city of the conquerors of his country; and when he walked abroad his eye rested on the vast walls of Babylon, with their circuit of fifty-six miles and their handsome gates of brass; or on the mighty river, flanked on this side and on that by its splendid embankments; or on the royal palace, with its world-famed hanging gardens; or on the temple of Belus, with its square towers rising one above another to an enormous height. And now and then he would wander beyond the city gates, or into some garden within the circuit of the walls, and there by the waters of Babylon he might sit down and weep among a band of fellow-captives whose hearts, like his own, were full of their distant and their desolated home. But everywhere around him throughout the vast empire-city were the trophies of victory which the conquering race had gathered from among the peoples who, generation after generation, had gone down before it. Everywhere he beheld in accumulated splendour the pride of life as Eastern conquerors alone knew how to marshal and to display. And yet when, sated with gazing on this vast hoard of magnificence and wealth, he turned his steps towards his own humble dwelling in some out-of-the-way court or neglected alley of the great city, and on reaching it took out from its wooden case the little well-thumbed roll of the Sacred Law, his thoughts glanced back to the site on which his eyes had just rested, and he frankly exclaimed: "I am as glad of Thy word as one that findeth great spoils."

The value and beauty of the Law is the subject of this the longest of the Psalms. The Law is referred to under many names, as God's truth, His word, His way, His righteousness, His commandments, His testimonies, His precepts, His ceremonies, His statutes, His judgments. It is referred to under one or another of these names in all the one hundred and seventy-

six verses of the psalm excepting two. To any one whose heart was not in sympathy with the Psalmist, this passive devotion, this reiterated praise of the Law might seem monotonous. But, in truth, when we examine it the apparent monotony is almost infinitely varied. To the Psalmist the Law is the Divine Mind and Will clothed in human speech, and he sets no bounds to its usefulness and its value. It is the true guide of man in all ages of his life; but especially if a young man would cleanse his way, it may be by ruling himself after this Law, which is God's Word. It is indeed a counsellor; it is a lamp to the feet; it is a light to the path. It may seem to be of little account amid the godless magnificence of the pagan city in which the Psalmist lives; but he knows that the world itself only holds on its way through unconscious obedience to its essential principles. "They continue to this day according to Thy ordinance, for all things serve Thee." Already in the Psalmist's eyes Babylon is judged by this sublime and awful law. "I am horribly afraid for the ungodly that forsake Thy law." "Thou hast trodden down all them that depart from Thy statutes, for they imagine but deceit. Thou puttest away all the ungodly of the earth like dross: therefore I love Thy testimonies. My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee, and I am afraid of Thy judgments." The Psalmist himself has learned to value it through the sufferings which he has experienced in his captivity. "Before I was troubled I went wrong, but now have I kept Thy word." "I know, Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thy very faithfulness has caused me to be troubled." "Oh, let Thy merciful kindness be my comfort, according unto Thy word unto Thy servant."

But now the knowledge of the Law makes him, the humble, the despised captive that he is, wiser than those ancient sages of Babylon whose counsels swayed the fate of empires. "I have more understanding than my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my study. I am wiser than the aged, because I keep Thy commandments." So persuaded is the Psalmist of the preciousness of the Law that he will one day proclaim it at the very court of the Babylonian monarch himself. "I will speak of Thy testimonies also, even before kings, and will not be ashamed." And if this should involve him in fresh trouble, he knows already what is his portion. "My soul is always in

my hand, yet do I not forget Thy law." "Many there are that trouble me and persecute me, yet do I not swerve from Thy testimonies." "Princes have persecuted me without a cause, but my heart standeth in awe of Thy word." Of the preciousness of the Law the Psalmist cannot say too much: "The law of Thy mouth is dearer unto me than thousands of gold and silver." "I love Thy commandments above gold and precious stones." "Thy testimonies have I claimed as my heritage for ever; and why? They are the very joy of my heart." "I am as glad of Thy word as are my Babylonian masters of their ill-gotten gains. I am as glad of Thy word as one that findeth great spoils."

Remark that it was only a small portion of the Old Testament which roused this enthusiasm in the devout Psalmist. It was nothing more than the Five Books of Moses. He was not thinking of the rich experiences of the histories of the kings, or of the wealth of spiritual force and beauty of the prophets. These were, it is true, for the most part already in existence, but they were not part of the Torah of the Law. For us Christians these later treasures of the Hebrew Scriptures rank as of equal value with those more ancient writings of which the Psalmist sung, and our Bible also contains other writings of yet greater value than any of these—the four sacred records of the words, acts, and sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God manifested in the flesh, on this our world; and the precious epistles in which His Apostles explain and enforce the full meaning of His life, of His teaching, of His death, of His resurrection. Surely we Christians ought to be able to say, with the emphasis of a higher intelligence than that of the exile in Babylon: "I am as glad of Thy word as one that findeth great spoils"?

In our day all educated people are pretty well agreed that the Bible is very highly to be prized, if for no other reason, yet on account of its unique place in the literature of the ancient world. Certainly, we Christians are not concerned to deny or to ignore the great literary attractions of the Bible, the many points of interest which it presents to the historian, to the poet, to the reasoner, to the man of taste. What poetry in any language surpasses Isaiah's? What political history is more full of incident and suggestiveness than that which we gather from the historians and the prophets of Israel during

those years when Palestine was the theatre of the long rivalry between the powers that ruled on the Nile and the powers that ruled on the Euphrates? Who in ancient literature is a more accomplished dialectician than is St. Paul? or who can pass so rapidly as he from logic to pathos, from the sentences which control the understanding to the sentences which touch the heart? Or where in the whole world of letters—even if a man did not, unhappily, believe its truth—where can we discover any narrative of a life that can compare, in point of literary as well as of moral beauty, with that which is given us by the Evangelists? It was not a great divine who, when he was asked what book he would choose, if for the rest of his life he was to be limited to reading only one book, answered that undoubtedly he would choose the Bible.

And yet its literary charms are not the chief or the real reason why we Christians prize the Bible; for the Bible is the book of the human race, and the great majority of the human race, whether from lack of sufficient education, or from other reasons, have no eye for purely literary beauty. Some of the best men that have ever lived have read and re-read Isaiah as if he were merely prose, and they know nothing about the politics of Egypt or Assyria, which so deeply affected the Jewish monarchy; and they do not understand the logic of St. Paul; and if they feel, yet they cannot give a reason for feeling, the finished perfection of the Gospel narratives; and yet they are conscious of something in the Bible which warrants them in applying to it that unspeakably sacred term the Word of God—something which they find in no other book whatever.

What, then, is the quality in the Bible which marks it off from all other books in the world, from the highest masterpieces of human genius, whether of ancient or of modern days? The answer is, Inspiration. St. Paul attributes inspiration to the books of the Old Testament, and with still higher reason the Christian Church attributes inspiration to the books of the New. But what do we mean by inspiration? The word means, generally, inward breathing, that secret operation of the Holy Spirit within the soul of man which by the gift of some clearer light, or of some greater strength than Nature can supply, carries it luminously, impetuously onwards towards truth and goodness. But this general inspiration evidently covers a great deal of ground. On the one hand, we say in

the Creed, repeating almost exactly St. Peter's words, that the Holy Ghost spake by the prophets; on the other, whenever a sinner is converted to God, it is in obedience to the light and the force of Divine grace. Both are samples of inspiration. What, then, does inspiration mean when we attribute it to the Bible?

Here we are met by a fact which has been often referred to of late years, that while the Church of Christ has always spoken of the Bible as inspired, she has never attempted to define what inspiration precisely is, and she has been withheld from attempting such a definition by a very good reason, namely, that inspiration is the action of a Being whose movements are necessarily quite beyond us. As our Lord says: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." We might dare reverently to add, so is every book that is inspired by the Spirit. Clearly we are in the presence of an agency the range and methods of which are too much out of our reach to allow us to attempt, at any rate, exact or exhaustive definition; and therefore if, for instance, the question be raised whether the Holy Inspiring Spirit suggested to the sacred authors not only the subjects about which they should write, but also the exact terms which they should employ, and the style and physiognomy of their compositions, it is only prudent to say we do not know. We do not know enough to draw the line with any confidence whatever between what in each author may have belonged to natural disposition, temperament, training, and what may be entirely due to a higher guidance or suggestion.

It may here be rejoined, "What is the good of attributing inspiration to the Bible if you cannot define what you mean by inspiration?" The answer is, that we can describe by their effects—by what they imply and by what they exclude—many things which we cannot define, that is, of which we cannot say what they are in themselves. What Locke, the philosopher, calls "simple ideas" are from the nature of the case incapable of being defined; but they are by no means incapable of being sufficiently described to enable us to recognise them at once. It does not by any means follow that inspiration means nothing, or that it means anything that we please,

because we cannot give a complete definition of it. It carries with it plainly some positive advantages and prerogatives which are not to be had, so far as we know, anywhere apart from it, and we may enumerate these without attempting formal definition. If the wind bloweth where it listeth, still we may hear the sound thereof; and thus inspiration means sometimes revelation, the unveiling to a human soul of some truth which could not have been known to it by the light of Nature. The first chapter of St. John's Gospel and the first chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians, to name no others, are inspired in this sense. Sometimes, again, inspiration means spiritual impulse—a movement within the writer's soul which urges him to write, and which guides him to choose certain subjects, or even to embody in his work certain documents which are already in existence. The historical books of the Old Testament generally and the narrative portions of the Gospels are in this sense inspired.

But inspiration is not only revelation of hidden truths, not only an impulse to write and a guidance while writing; it is also, in whatever degree, a protection and assistance to the writer against the errors which beset him on this side and on that—a protection which, if it be good for anything, must at least be assured to extend to all matters of faith and morality. To talk about guidance from on high would be misleading if the writer who is so guided is allowed to make mistakes in the very subjects for the purpose of which the guidance is presumably pledged.

Nor is the idea of inspiration by God the Holy Spirit reconcilable with the singular idea which we may encounter nowadays in some quarters, that an inspired book, while containing matter more or less interesting, may yet be somehow fundamentally untrustworthy. This would seem to be a very obvious and unnecessary remark on my part if we were not told that books of the Old Testament, which some critics still describe as in some sense inspired, are really of such a character that we cannot possibly rely on their contents as conveying, I will not say the will of God, but such a true account of human affairs as we should expect in a secular author. Now, take the case of the Book of Daniel. Whether the Book of Daniel was written in the sixth century B.C. or in the second century B.C. may seem

to persons who have not looked into the subject a very dry question indeed, interesting only to scholars. Daniel, they may say, whatever his date, is part of the Bible ; but in reality upon the settlement of this question depends the further question whether the Book of Daniel is what it plainly claims to be, or whether it is the forgery of a later age, designed to assist the Jews in their resistance to the pagan king Antiochus Epiphanes, but wholly untrustworthy as a record of what the prophet whose name it bears really did and said in his lifetime. If this last estimate of the book, which is involved in assigning to it a later date, be a true account of the book, then the book would rank with or beneath those celebrated False Decretals which were written in Northern France in the middle of the ninth century of our era, and in which the Bishops of Rome in the first three centuries were made to use the language and to advance the claims that were natural to the Popes of the early middle ages. If this could be proved to be a true account of the book, it would be difficult to maintain the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself as a teacher of religious truth, considering that He largely based His claim to the Messiahship on the great prophecy which the Book of Daniel contains, that He adopted from it the title Son of Man, that by which He willed to be known among men. If the Book of Daniel be the fiction of a Jewish patriot of the time of Epiphanes, it can no longer be described as inspired, or as the Word of God, unless these high titles are consistent with a lack of natural veracity which would be fatal to the reputation of works of the most ordinary and mundane pretensions. This is not the time or place to attempt to set forth in detail the arguments based on history and on language which, if we believe that purely predictive prophecy is possible, should oblige us to accept the earlier date. I am only saying that to hold the book to be a low forgery with a political object, and yet to go on talking about its inspiration, is inconsistent and misleading. The property of inspiration attaching to the Bible is felt in its having, from first to last, a constant purpose of leading man to God and to a higher life. This motive is sometimes more, sometimes less, in the foreground, but it runs throughout the sacred volume. It is as discernible in the Song of Solomon as in the Book of Exodus ; in the Book of Esther as in Isaiah ; in the Epistle to Philemon as in the Gospel

of St. John. To take the simple out of the dust, to lift the poor out of the mire, and to set him with the princes of God's people in the heavenly country—this is its aim, an aim pursued sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly, sometimes by precept, sometimes by example, sometimes by pointing to secular records, to heathen histories, to appalling crimes; more often by displaying the providences of God over men and nations, by disclosing His will, by exhibiting the attractive lives of His servants, and by unveiling the great and precious promises of the life to come.

But in order to discern this, the real object of the Bible, the real drift and meaning of its inspiration, we must be in a certain frame of mind, we must have certain dispositions of thought, heart, feeling, will. To those who are without these dispositions the Bible commonly says nothing more than other books, if indeed it does not do us positive harm. It cannot be read profitably by a person who is only interested in its language, or only in its antiquities, or only in its poetry or its history or its logic, just as public prayers and sacraments are worse than useless to those who are only concerned with the aids to worship, with the architecture of the church, with the music, with the outward order of the service, and without the inward graces of faith, hope, charity towards God and man, and contrition for past sins. If we would come into contact with the inspiration of the Bible, we must, as we read it, be looking out for God, for His truth, for His will, for all that reflects His presence, for all that speaks of Him and for Him. St. Augustine was already looking out for God when the great change in his life was precipitated by a single passage in the Epistle to the Romans: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ;" and the millions who have found in the daily use of Holy Scripture abundant proof of its power not only to lift them above the passions and errors of a sinful life, but to guide and maintain them at a new and higher level of thought and purpose, afford in this experience at least one very striking evidence of its inspiration.

That a great many people in our day are so far from being as glad of God's Word as one that findeth great spoil, that, to speak bluntly, they do not care very much about it, is, I

fear, undeniable; and we sometimes hear this accounted for by the remark that the Bible is now too common to be prized as the Law was prized by the Psalmist of the exile. If the Bible is the most precious, it is also in our day and country the cheapest, of all books; and men commonly measure books, like other things, by their value in the market of the world. And the Bible is said to owe some of the neglect which attends it to the fact that it has been placed within everybody's reach. This reasoning has a certain truth in it, but it is a truth which is discreditable to human nature rather than to the Bible. We think, perhaps, cheaply of the sunlight because it bathes us in its beauty each day of our lives from morning until evening; but this does not show that it is the less entitled to our wonder and admiration, but only that our sense of beauty is so feeble and so dull as to require the stimulus of rarity or of novelty. The Bible is neither more nor less inspired to-day, when it can be bought for a few pence, than it was in days when the manuscript of portions of it was paid for by the gold of a comparatively few persons. The real difference is that we are less careful than our forefathers to make the most of it, and it is to this that the Collect draws our attention. Certainly, whenever we attend the service of the Church, the Bible is read to us, whether in the Epistle and Gospel at the celebration of the Holy Communion, or in the First and Second Lessons at the morning and evening service. Do we listen to it with the reverence, the eagerness, the care which is due to a message from on high, or to an account of what has passed on this earth written under higher than earthly guidance? Are those listless, weary, preoccupied faces of men and women, as they too often are, who are hearing, it may be, as this afternoon, the very words of Jesus Christ pleading with the Eternal Father, the faces of Christians who rejoice in the Master's Word as in a treasure of priceless worth? Is there not some reason for fearing, especially in churches where the service altogether is illustrated by the great and beautiful resources of sacred music, that the Lessons are often comparatively unheeded, and that listeners impatiently endure the Word of God itself read at the lectern that they may enjoy the human art which illustrates the Word of God in the canticles or in the anthem? If, as is sometimes the case in a large church, we

have difficulty in following the reader of the Lessons, we can surely remedy this by bringing with us a pocket Bible or a Church Service and reading for ourselves. In any case, when the Bible is read in church, a Christian soul should say deliberately to itself: "Now God is speaking; let me try to consider what He will say to me." But we pray that we may read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Bible with definitely spiritual results at home. Such a prayer, my brethren, is scarcely sincere if we make no efforts to act conformably to its drift. Is there not, I ask you, reason to fear that the Bible is less regularly read in private by many Christians nowadays than used to be the case some years ago? In our busy day people do not allow themselves the necessary half or even quarter of an hour. Business, pleasure, engagements of all kinds, conversation, the newspapers, the monthly periodicals, the novels from the circulating library, devour the time which might be given to the Word of God. Whether we do or do not devote a quarter of an hour a day to reading the Bible will not, we perhaps say to ourselves, make much difference at the end of the day or at the end of a week, but it will have made a great difference at the end of the year. We should be different men according as we have or have not been in spiritual contact with the Word of God for a quarter of an hour each day during one and still more during five or ten years.

Nothing will be done unless we have a definite rule to which other things are made to give way. Time can be made if we are resolved to make time by getting up a little earlier, by going to bed a little later, by giving up some less profitable expenditure of the working hours of the day; and whether we follow the daily Lessons, reading them over again if, happily, we go to church, that we may make more certain of their meaning, or read through the Bible independently, we ought to have a rule about it. Without a rule the best general resolutions will soon give way to the urgent claims of business or to the seductive demands of pleasure, and they will cease to shape the habits of our lives.

And then we must not merely read, but mark what we read. We may do well to take this word quite literally, and mark with pen or pencil on the margin of the Holy Book, or on the pages of an interleaved copy of it, the passages which at

particular times in our lives have spoken most vividly to our souls. But whether we do this or not we do well to remember that the Bible, like nature, like conscience, richly rewards close observation and study. It is not a uniform service; it is infinitely varied, and the variations present themselves to no two souls in exactly the same way, and to no one soul in exactly the same way at all times of its probation. Like nature, it has many aspects and moods underlying unchanging truths, addressing themselves to varying moods of men with varying effect; and just as spring, and summer, and autumn, and winter, and morning, and evening, and gloom, and sunshine affect us most variously at different times of our lives; so in the Bible—at one time the histories, at another the doctrinal Epistles, at another the words of the Incarnate Son in the Gospels, touch us most closely. That it should be so is most natural, since He whose uncreated beauty is veiled by the spangled robe of Nature that meets our eyes is also He who, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in times past to our religious forefathers by the Prophets, and has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son. But if we are to understand what the truth of written revelation is, what He says to us at one and what at another time of our lives, how and when He speaks through the familiar words most persuasively, most to our inward spirits, we must mark His utterances as well as read them.

And not merely read and mark, but learn them. It is of no little practical value to have learned by heart large portions of Scripture, and I suppose that many Church-people have learned as children and still remember the Epistles and Gospels throughout the year; while some, at any rate, of the Psalms, such as the twenty-fourth, or the fifty-first, or the one hundredth and thirtieth, would be well known by almost all serious Christians. But in ages when the Bible was generally less accessible than now because it existed only in manuscript, many Christians knew by heart considerable portions of it, such as the whole of the Psalter and several books of the New Testament. Certainly it is better to carry about the inspired words in our memories than to keep them only in a well-bound volume on the shelves of a library—better for us in days of health and strength, but especially better in days of sickness. It is a matter of experience that a patient may be

too ill to bear even the sound of another human voice, while yet the understanding is clear and keen and the memory retentive. At such a time how unspeakably welcome are those passages of the Word of God which have been learned by heart in the days of youth and strength, and which now speak to the soul with all the force and meaning of suffering! A servant of Christ who was taken from us not many years ago, who knew by heart most of the Psalms in Hebrew, used to repeat them to himself again and again during his illnesses. "I am never alone," he said cheerfully, when he was getting better, in reply to an apology for having left him when he was apparently unconscious,—*"I am never alone; I always have the Psalms; I am constantly learning more and more from them."*

And, once more, the Collect prays that we may inwardly digest, as well as read and mark and learn, the Scriptures which are written for us. It is possible to fail in this last and most important point after succeeding tolerably well with the first three. The sacred words, although read and marked and learned by heart, may yet remain as a portion of the body on the surface of the soul, instead of passing into its system, instead of quickening and clearing faith, of brightening hope, of kindling charity, and adding force to motive, impulse to prayer, varied intelligence to the sense of duty, perfecting everywhere within the soul the glow and circulation of the Divine life; of thought, feeling, resolve, with tints that do not belong to our earthly atmosphere, to our every-day experience. Only after some years of intimacy with Scripture, and after many a prayer to Him whose Book it is that He would make its meaning plain to us and its forces operative within our souls, can we hope that this inward assimilation of the fibre of our life to the mind of Scripture has indeed begun. And then how much becomes easy that before was difficult, and how many things plain that had been hitherto obscure!—the secret sense of Scripture underlying the letter which St. Paul sets before us so strikingly in his interpretation of the history of Sarah and Hagar in the Epistle to the Galatians; the anticipations of our Lord in type as well as prophecy throughout the Old Testament; the profound lesson of the Book of Job, that the proportion between the dispensing of good and evil fortune in this life points irresistibly to another; or of

Ecclesiastes, which else we might mistake for the despair of some jaded Epicurean, that all that has not God for its object is vanity indeed ; or of the Song of Solomon, which, taken in the letter, may read like an Oriental love-song, but is in reality descriptive of the uncreated charity in his relation with the Church or with the soul of man ; or, again, the winning but awful doctrines of sacramental grace in such chapters as the third or sixth of St. John ; the high standard of practice set before us in Paul's Epistles ; the warnings, consolations, the terrors, the ecstasies of the Apocalypse. Certain it is that, in view of the future world, there is no book that we should prize so highly as the Bible. It unveils that world, and tells us how to reach it in safety. It does not flatter or spare our faults, but also it does not discourage us. It sets before us the hope which we have in our incarnate, crucified, risen, Redeemer. If there were no future, we might possibly dispense with the Bible. As matters are, it is the one book which we cannot afford to dispense with ; it is the one authorised guide through life to the eternal home beyond. Well may each of us resolve to-day that we will devote more time and thought and effort to make ourselves at home with it, for it may help us, as no other book in the world can do, so to pass through things temporal that we finally miss not the things eternal.

GOD'S JUSTICE AND THE CROSS.*

“That He might be just and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus”
—ROM. iii. 26.

TO-DAY we enter on those fourteen days which bring the season of Lent to a close, while they also form the most solemn part of it. As the Jews kept their Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, so we Christians pause on the fourteenth day before Easter. We reflect that we are crossing a line. We are passing within the inmost precinct of time which leads us up to the greatest of festivals. Until now, since Ash Wednesday, we have been mainly, I trust, concerned with our sins, with their nature, with their number, with the consequences to which, if unrepented of, they must lead. To-day we fix our eyes on the Friend of penitent sinners, Whose sufferings and death are the ground of their acceptance by a Holy God. The services for the day mark the change. The epistle teaches us how the blood of Christ, Who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without a spot to God, purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God. The gospel describes one of those scenes which were preparations or rehearsals for the great tragedy that was to follow, the scene in which, when our Lord had announced his Divinity in the Temple courts by saying that He already existed before Abraham was, the Jews took up stones to cast at Him.

And thus, on Palm Sunday, it is natural to address ourselves, under the guidance of the Apostle, to the great question which lies behind the whole history of the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. What was the main purpose

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, April 7th, being the Fifth Sunday in Lent, 1839.

of those sufferings? Why should we contemplate, year after year, the spectacle of a life marked by all the virtues and excellences of which human life is capable, sullied by none of the sins with which all other human lives have been, in their various degrees, degraded and defiled, and yet ending in a fashion which, in the common judgment of men, befits only the most worthless and criminal of mankind? The question demands an answer, and it is answered in various ways. Let us notice one or two of the answers. Let us begin at the bottom.

And here we need not spend much time on the opinion that the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ had no ascertainable purpose whatever, that they were brought about by the operation of forces which mould human history, but without any result, or any aim. "These blind forces," it is said, "which act sometimes through the workings of inanimate nature, sometimes through the malignity of human wills, were the real authors of the crime of Calvary; and as we know nothing of these, beyond the fact of their energy, we need not look beyond them in order to account for the spectacle of the best of human lives ending as though it had been the worst, for the apparently extravagant anomaly that, while the Cæsar Tiberius was enthroned in Rome, Jesus Christ should have been crucified in Jerusalem." This account of the sufferings of Christ cannot be discussed with advantage to-day, since to discuss it would be to open no less a question than whether there is any Divine Governor of the world at all. Suffice it to say that if there is a Being Who, on the one hand, is almighty, and, on the other, is not mere power, not mere intelligence, but has a moral character, then, most assuredly, whatever appearances may seem to suggest, at certain times, and to certain minds, the world is governed by Him. If a great deal is permitted to go on in it which is a contradiction to the moral nature of such a Ruler, this only shows that, for reasons which we can conjecture rather than be sure of, He

has allowed that disturbing element, which we call sin, to enter into it and to mar His work, and, in the train of sin, pain and death. The sufferings of Christ are thus only an extreme illustration of what we see everywhere around us on a smaller scale, but they afford no ground for the opinion that human lives drift hopelessly before blind forces which are as entirely without moral purpose as the wave or the hurricane is void of intelligence or of sympathy.

A more satisfactory account of the sufferings of our Lord is that they were the crowning feature of a great public testimony—a testimony which He bore to the sacredness of truth. As action is more eloquent than language, so patient suffering is more eloquent than action, and thus Jesus Christ, after proclaiming truth to His disciples, and, in a measure to the world, and after illustrating it by His conduct and His works of power, finally surrendered Himself to every kind of indignity and torture, and laid down His life in order to attest its value. That is, indeed, it may be truly urged, His own account of the matter. “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto the truth.” Certain, then, it is that to bear witness to truth was one object which our Lord had in view throughout His life, and especially at His death. But the question is whether this was the only or the most important object. If it was, then we must say that He does not in this differ from those who, in generation after generation, have not only talked and acted, but have suffered, in order to bear their witness to truth, or to that which they have sincerely, if mistakenly, supposed to be truth. Even sages, Jewish prophets, Christian martyrs, have all, in their several degrees and manners, done this service for the honour of truth—Christian martyrs have done it in particular. If Christ died only as a Witness to truth, it may be questioned whether some of the humblest of His disciples have not gone near to rival the moral splendour of their Master’s death. No, my friends;

there is a more important purpose in the sufferings and death of our Lord, which distinguishes it from any other death that ever took place on this our earth. It was intended—so His Apostle tells us—to declare, to set forth in the language of action before the eyes of men, an attribute of the Most High God. The attribute which St. Paul names is not, as we might expect, God's love, or God's mercy—although we know, on an authority even higher than that of St. Paul, that if God gave His only-begotten Son to die, it was "because He so loved the world," and from St. Paul himself that "God commendeth His love towards us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,"—but the attribute of which the Apostle is thinking in the passage before us is not God's love, but His righteousness, or justice. It was to declare God's righteousness, he says, that Jesus Christ was set forth as a Propitiation. Jesus Christ crucified, attentively considered, would make it plain, he contends, how God is, on the one hand, in Himself righteous, and, on the other, not less righteous when He justifies the sinner who believes in Jesus.

Now, let us consider this. When we speak of justice or righteousness, we pre-suppose the existence of a law of right—a law to which justice conforms, which it upholds, maintains, defends, extends. This law of right has its witness partly in the structure of society, partly in the conscience of man. If human society is largely, as it is, unfaithful to this law, it cannot altogether neglect it without going to pieces sooner or later in a tempest of bloodshed and disorder. And the conscience of every man attests the existence of right as opposed to wrong, whether he be or be not well informed as to what is right and what is wrong, whether he be loyal or disloyal to that which he rightly or wrongly holds for right. The law of right, and with it the accompanying idea of justice, is thus part of the constitution of the human mind. Without doing violence to the mind which God has given us, and which, although impaired, has not been utterly ruined by that ancient

shock which we call the Fall, we cannot bring ourselves to conceive of a time when right was not right, and when justice was not a virtue—when, for instance, honesty was not obligatory upon any being possessing intelligence, and having a moral nature. And if right was always right, and justice was always obligatory, then right and justice do not belong to the world of time, they precede and are independent of it. They may have furnished a rule of life to beings in other spheres, widely differing from ourselves in force and in intelligence, and in everything but the possession of a moral nature. They may be as we know them, only adaptations from their original form to the case and need of man in his years of passage through time. Anyhow, our moral sense tells us that they have an existence to which no beginning can be imagined, that they are eternal like God. And since nothing distinct from God can be conceived of as eternal—for in that case there would be two Eternals, that is to say, there would be two Gods—it follows that right and justice are not anything distinct from God, that they belong to, that they are parts of His essential nature; that they belong to it in such a sense that we cannot conceive of Him as being without them. Man is still man though he be utterly devoid of justice, but God would not be God if—may He pardon the imagination—if He could be conceived of as being unjust. Justice is not a separable attribute of God's nature. To think of God as unrighteous is only a mode of thinking of Him as not existing at all. This great truth, the justice or righteousness of God, it was a main purpose of the Jewish revelation to teach and to keep before the eyes of men. From generation to generation its voice is—"Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and true is Thy judgment," "The testimonies that Thou hast commanded are exceeding righteous and true," "Thy righteousness standeth like the strong mountains, Thy judgments are like the great deep," "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, His countenance with

behold the thing that is just," "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, holy in all His works," "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." This was the idea which ran through the whole religion of Israel. It was a reiterated assertion of God's righteousness. Its law was a proclamation of righteousness applied to human life. Its prophets were advocates and preachers of righteousness to generations which had forgotten what righteousness meant. Its penalties—even its temporal penalties—were the sanctions of righteousness; its saints were the living embodiments, within limits, and not without imperfections, of righteousness. Its sacrifices for sin were a perpetual reminder of the sterner aspects of Divine righteousness, in its contrast to the easy indifference to evil of some Epicurean Divinity. And the promises given to Israel pointed to One Who would make clearer than ever to man the beauty and the power of Divine righteousness. Righteousness was to be the girdle of His loins. With righteousness He was to judge the poor. He would be a branch of righteousness—nay, His name would be called "the Lord, our Righteousness." And so, when He came, He was named emphatically "the Just One," and "Jesus Christ, the Righteous;" and it was but in accordance with these titles that, both in His life and in His death, He revealed to man the righteousness of God as it had never been revealed before.

But how was the death, as distinct from the life or the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, a declaration of God's righteousness? Here we must consider what righteousness is. It is not a dormant—it is an eminently active—attribute. There is no such thing as a working distinction between a theoretical and a practical justice. A theoretical justice which is not also practical is, to put it bluntly, practical injustice. The whole virtue and force of justice lies in its being something operative; and if this is true in man, much more true is it in the perfectly just Being, in God. To conceive of God as just in Himself, but as indifferent to the

strict requirements of justice in the world which He has made, would, one might think, be impossible for any clear and reverent mind; and yet this conception is by no means uncommon. "If I were God," many a man has said to himself, "I would not require that sin should be punished; I would forgive the sinner, just as a good-natured man forgives a personal offence against himself, without expecting an equivalent at the hands of the offender or his representatives." Observe here the confusion between an offence against a brother man and an offence against God. You and I are not beings of such a character that every offence against us involves an infraction of the eternal law of right; and we do well to take the Divine advice to forgive, even until seventy times seven, a brother's sins against us. But with the Master of the moral universe it is otherwise. That the violation of right must be followed by punishment is just as much part of the absolute law of right, as is the existence of right itself, and God—let it be said with reverence—God can no more dispense with this consequence of sin than with anything else that is rooted in the eternal attributes of His nature. In its healthier moments the conscience even of the heathen world has clearly perceived this truth, that penalty at some time or other must follow our crime, and that a judge who did not see to this would fail in his duty. If the maxim holds in human law that the acquittal of the guilty is the condemnation of the judge, *Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur*, it holds true in a higher sense of Him Who is absolute justice, of Him Whose passionless rectitude is as incapable of being disturbed by false benevolence as by a prejudiced animosity, Who punishes as He blesses, because He is what He is—the Rule as well as the Administrator of righteousness.

Well, my friends, the death of our Lord Jesus Christ was a proclamation of God's righteousness in exacting the penalty which is due to sin. Never was the guilt of sin so portrayed

before the eyes of man, never was the penalty due to sin so perfectly paid, as on Mount Calvary. That debt which man could not pay to the Divine justice was paid in man's nature by the Only Begotten Son of God, and in paying it He declared God's righteousness, His stern and awful condemnation of sin, His utter remoteness from the degrading conception of a ruler who condones, out of easy good nature, that which true justice must condemn. If we would take the measure of moral evil, let us not merely track it to its results here in the sphere of time—the workhouse, the prison, the gallows—let us not even think only of that infinitely more overwhelming scene, the eternal condition of the lost: let us stand in the spirit on Mount Calvary, and there note how the Divine Sufferer “bears our sins in His own body on the tree,” and how He is “made sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

But here it will be asked whether God's justice is not compromised in the very act of its assertion, whether the penalty paid by the sinless Sufferer is not inconsistent with the rule of justice that every man should bear his own burden, and that the real sinner should be punished for his sins. Now this raises the question as to the cases in which a vicarious penalty is unjust, for such a penalty is not always unjust. It is not unjust, for instance, when the person who pays it has a natural title to represent the criminal. We see this in the case of parent and child. A parent not only may, but must, be answerable for his child's misconduct. When a boy injures the property of his neighbour, breaks down his fences, steals his apples, the boy's father has to pay. The boy has no means of paying, and natural and civil law are agreed in making the father responsible for his son's misconduct, and in exacting from him the payment which the boy himself cannot produce. The father is innocent of any sort of sympathy with his son's behaviour, but natural and human law make him answerable for its consequences because he is his son's father, because as

a father he stands in, and cannot rid himself of, a representative relation to his son, a relation which would entitle him to credit for his son's good character, but which actually makes him answerable for his son's misconduct.

The Bible illustrates this natural law by the history of Eli, the High Priest of Israel. Eli's vicious sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were grown-up men; they occupied an honourable and responsible position, and Eli, we might think, could disclaim responsibility for their profligate and sacrilegious proceedings, but neither the conscience of Israel nor the conscience of Eli himself would have permitted this. As the father of his sons, Eli represented them, and the tragic close of his life marked this relation of inalienable responsibility in which he stood to them. On the other hand, a parent's conduct, good or bad, affects profoundly the destiny of his descendants. The constitution which you and I inherit from our parents may be sound and healthy, or it may be charged with the seeds of fatal disease. In either case we are bound up with the physical condition of our parents. Their temperate habits or their loose ways of living some forty or fifty years ago have a present effect on our daily lives, and the good or bad name which a parent leaves to his children colours and shapes their lives in a thousand ways, even though by their own misconduct his children should forfeit the advantages of the one, or by their virtues should struggle against the disadvantages of the other. To be the son of David procured for Solomon delay of the penalty which his own misdeeds had deserved; to be descended from Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, "who made Israel to sin," was to ascend a throne which was already forfeited. Nor is this a peculiarity of Jewish history. The Romans welcomed with enthusiasm the worthless son of Marcus Aurelius, though they already knew something of his character. The death of Louis the Sixteenth was not wholly due to Jacobin ferocity, still less to personal misconduct of his own, but to the acts and policy

of his ancestors, who had bequeathed to their unfortunate successor the fatal legacy of the disaffection and discontent of a great people. Certainly, the application of this principle is modified partly by the prophet Ezekiel's teaching on the subject, and partly by the Gospel doctrine of individual responsibility; it is, I say, modified—it is limited, if you will, it is not abrogated or forbidden. We still see before our eyes that a parent is answerable, within limits, for the conduct of his sons, and that a parent's good or bad conduct has a great influence on their lives; and St. Paul applies this consideration to the relation of our first parent to the whole human family. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners," and, since death is the penalty of sin, it followed that—as he says again—"in Adam all died." Adam's representative relation to the human family made his acts representative also, and every child of Adam must consequently say, "Behold, I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin hath my mother conceived me."

Now this representative character belonged to our Lord Jesus Christ not less truly than to our natural parent Adam. This is the deepest meaning of His name, "the Son of Man." It means the true Child of the race; the Man who has a title to represent humanity. And this is why St. Paul called Him "the second Adam." He stood in a representative relation to that which was occupied by the first. There are, of course, important differences. Adam represents all the descendants who derived their physical life from him. Christ represents all who derive their spiritual life from Him. Natural birth is the link which binds us to Adam; spiritual birth is the link which binds us to Christ. The connection between parent and child is established, in the one case, by the law of physical descent; in the other case, by the spiritual act of faith and the gifts which faith claims and receives. But the representation is as real in the one case as in the other; and it relieves our Lord's vicarious sufferings of the imputation

of capricious injustice which has been made on them. He is, in Isaiah's language, "the everlasting Father," or the Parent of the coming age, who pays the penalty for the misdeeds of His children; and, in claiming by faith our share in His work, we are falling back on a law of representation which is common ground to the world of nature and to the Kingdom of Grace, and which can only be charged with injustice if God is to be debarred on some arbitrary and *à priori* ground from treating His creatures as members of a common body as well as in their individual capacity.

But then, further, not only did our Lord's representative nature give Him a title to take our place upon the Cross—it was His good pleasure to do so. Surely there is no injustice in accepting a satisfaction which is freely offered. When a savage tribe—to refer to an illustration which has been offered in a hostile sense—when a savage tribe would fain expiate its offences before the idol of some imaginary deity by the sacrifice of a prisoner of war, the victim is dragged to death against his will; and if all else in the proceeding were as real as it is the reverse, this destruction of a life against the will of its owner would alone involve the forfeiture of any moral value attaching to the proceeding. If we could conceive our Lord Jesus Christ as having been put to death against His will, it would be impossible to make good a moral basis for the atoning virtue of His death; but the Bible lays particular stress on the fact that, whilst His judges and executioners seemed to be working their own will, He Himself was a willing victim. "No man," He said, "taketh My life from Me. I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." "Sacrifices and burnt offerings Thou wouldest not. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin hast Thou had no pleasure. Then, said I, lo! I come to do Thy will, O God! He taketh away the first that He may establish the second, by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all;" or, as

to-day's epistle tells us, "Christ, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God." And, therefore, because our Lord took a nature which represented the race, and freely willed to act and suffer in that nature as its Representative, His death has, without any slur on the law of justice, a propitiatory and atoning virtue. It is a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

But, as we are discussing the question of justice, there is just one more question to be asked: How could the penalty paid by one man, though he were the very pride and flower of the race, be accepted as a penalty sufficient to atone for the sins of the millions upon millions of men committed through a long course of centuries—the sins of the antediluvian world, the sins of Sodom and of Egypt, of Nineveh and of Babylon, of Greece, of Rome, of the wild races whom, in their pride, Greeks and Romans called barbarians, the sins of Israel and of Christendom, the sins of the New World and of the Old, the sins of the centuries that may be to come, as well as of the ages that are passed—the sins, to go no further, that are committed in one twenty-four hours in this London of ours, or your sins and mine during the years that we have been permitted to spend upon this earth? When the mind's eye runs over this immense, this incalculable, amount, it is impossible not to ask how it could be that the offering of a single life, though it were of the best and purest, could make atonement for the enormous accumulation of evil to the severe sanctity and justice of God. My brethren, had the life which was offered been only a human life, it could not have made any such atonement. No mere man may deliver his brother or make agreement unto God for him. He Who died on Calvary was more than man, and it is that higher and Divine nature to which His manhood was united at His incarnation which imparts to all that He did and suffered as man a strictly infinite value. We think over the vastness of human sin, and

we ask ourselves how it could have been atoned for by a single act of patient obedience carried forward to the extremity of a cruel death ; but if we allow our thoughts really to contemplate the infinitude of God, our wonder will be, not that the death of Christ should have effected so much, but rather, so far as we know, it should have effected so little. I say "so far as we know," for it may have had relation to other worlds and to other orders of beings of which we know nothing, although it may have had no effects beyond the Redemption won for and offered to man. To achieve that Redemption it was plainly more than equal. Apart from all rhetorical exaggeration, the death of One who was God as well as man might have redeemed a thousand worlds ; and, if its effects were limited to this world, it corresponds in the sphere of grace to that rule of God's working—for it would seem to be a rule—which elsewhere we call "waste of nature." Mark in a flowering plant how large a number of blossoms drop off without bearing fruit, how few of the seeds that ripen fall where they can possibly germinate, and of those which do take root, how small a proportion do anything more. And note how in the animal world the preparations for life are out of all proportion to the lives which actually survive. One has only to consider the fecundity of the rabbit, or of certain birds, or the roe of a fish, or certain insects, the descendants of each one of which within a year are literally counted, as it has been proved, by millions of millions. The premature death of the vast majority of living creatures thus ushered into existence has led people to ask whether it would not have been better to create only so much life as, according to their estimate, was wanted, and to withhold the rest. This is the reasoning of a finite creature surveying from his petty point of view the boundless resources and the magnificent profusion of the great Creator. The rules which apply to a narrow home and to bounded powers have no place whatever in the calculations of the Infinite. The unstinted profusion

which marks God's ways in Nature is also His characteristic in Redemption and grace, and if, as we may think, He does more than He need do in order to save us without tampering with His own eternal law of right, it is because His resources, and what even a great heathen, in one of his higher moments, could call "His ungrudging generosity," are alike without limit. At any rate, if the death of our Lord Jesus Christ offered more than a satisfaction, there can be no question that the satisfaction which it offered was fully adequate, or that the blood of Him, the Son of God, cleanses from all human sin.

What, dear brethren, should be the uppermost thought in our minds during the next fortnight, but that of the inestimable love of God in the redemption of the world through our Lord Jesus Christ? Let us think of this love as being also essentially justice, as maintaining the eternal law of right, while pardoning the sinner who is united by faith to the sinless Redeemer, from Whom and Whom alone all the means of grace, all the assurances and certificates of forgiveness which are found in the Christian Church, derive their efficiency and their virtue, even as through Him alone is there any access to the Father, or any hope of life in the future world.

And of this let us be sure, that we all of us have need of Him. Christians have sometimes allowed themselves to speak as if those who led moral lives would be saved by their good conduct, while profligates and reprobates who could do nothing better must fall back on the expiation which was offered on the cross. Little can any who hold this language have explored the secrets of their own hearts, have taken even a superficial measure of the holiness of God; little can they have penetrated beneath the surface of life, beneath the actions and language which years of habit have made more and more conventional, down to that deep unseen world of motive in which the eternal issues are determined, and

which lies ever open to the Divine eye. It is within the soul that we see ourselves as we are, that we see how poor or how base is much that outwardly seems so fair, that we observe how acts that have passed with others for the outcome and product of our humility, of our self-abnegation, or our charity for men, or our love of God, have been tainted within, ay, to the core, by the baneful energy of self in its hundred forms, by jealousy, by ambition, by subtle pride, by a thirst for the praise of men—even of men whom it is difficult for us to respect—by motives, in short, not one of which will bear to be placed beneath the survey of God. Only when this scrutiny has been honest and persevering do we understand how the best of Christians, like St. Paul, or St. Augustine, or the late John Keble, have often and unaffectedly spoken of themselves as among the worst of mankind. It is because they have known so much more than most of us of Him Who is the only true measure of holiness, and, as such, the only true measure of sin. Only when we have thus looked at our lives again and again, not from without, but from within, do we understand how very little outward conduct, however unimpeachable it may seem to be, is fitted to be a ground of confidence that we shall be accepted by Him Who sees us, not as men see us, not as we delight to look upon ourselves, but as we really are. A true self-knowledge means much else, but in a Christian it means this especially—a constant, conscious dependence on the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ for pardon and acceptance. It shows us that the difference between great criminals and ourselves may be less than we thought; that we may only not have been as they in consequence of restraining motives which were not religious, or from lack of urgent temptation, or from lack of opportunity. The end may be nearer than we think. Death is as busy as ever. Only yesterday he reminded us that we all, the highest as well as the lowest in the land, await his summons. If we are to be saved, we must be saved by a bounty which we

have not deserved, we must be saved by a justice upon which we can assert no claim, save that of association, through faith on our part, through means of grace on His, with the perfectly Just One. But that claim which we can, if we will, everyone of us put forward, is an imperative claim. Our Lord Jesus Christ can, and will, "save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him."

THE CHRISTIAN WARRIOR.*

"A good soldier of Jesus Christ."—2 TIM. ii. 3.

THE metaphor which the Apostle here chooses to describe the work of a primitive Christian bishop cannot but strike us as remarkable. He is writing to Timothy, whom he had appointed to take charge of the Church at Ephesus; and Timothy had a work to do, which was, in many respects, hard and discouraging, while he would appear to have been by nature a man of soft and easy disposition, inclined rather to shrink from difficulty and danger than to look it in the face, and so standing in some need of a bracing word of advice and warning such as the Apostle here addresses to him: "Thou, therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." But that the Apostle should have put what he has to say into this precise form, is not what we should have anticipated. Himself a servant of the Prince of Peace, and writing to another servant of the Prince of Peace, he might, we may think, have gone somewhere else for his metaphor than to the profession of arms. Was not the Gospel heralded from heaven as "Peace on earth among men in whom God is well pleased?" Did not prophecy speak of Christ's coming as a time when men should "beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, April 28th, being the First Sunday after Easter, 1889.

into pruning-hooks," a time when "nation should not lift up sword against nation, neither should they learn war any more"? And, however imperfectly this ideal might have been realised in late days, could there be any doubt as to the general spirit and drift of Christianity as being opposed to war? War, for example, is represented by St. James as the outcome and expression of insurgent and selfish desire, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot attain; ye fight, and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not." This is a picture of aggressive war. And a Christian's business, by way of contrast, is to study the things that make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another. How, then, are we to explain the honour which the Apostle puts upon the military profession when he points to a soldier as embodying, at any rate, some of the qualities which he desires to see in a rule of the Church of God?

We cannot say, by way of reply, that the metaphor is so accidental, or so singular, that stress ought not in fairness to be laid on it, for there is a great deal more religious language with a military colouring, or flavour, about it not merely in the Old Testament, but in the New. "Fight the good fight of faith," writes St. Paul to Timothy, "lay hold on eternal life." "Quit you like men," he bids the Corinthians, "quit you like men; be strong." "Your adversary, the devil," exclaims St. Peter, "as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour; him resist, steadfast in the faith." "So fight I," writes St. Paul to the Corinthians, "not as one that beateth the air"—in other words, "every blow I aim at my spiritual adversary tells." Or, to omit other illustrations, what can be more suggestive than that well-known passage of the Epistle to the Ephesians, in which the Apostle, chained as he is while writing it to a Roman soldier,

connects each portion of his warder's dress and accoutrements with some one of those graces which a Christian needs in order to encounter the powers of evil: "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore"—and here his eyes turn to the soldier before him—"wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith wherewith to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Thus the girdle, the breastplate, the military sandals, the shield, the helmet, the sword of the Roman legionary, suggest, each of them, to the Apostle a separate Christian grace, or endowment, or power. But he thinks of the Christian as engaged in a warfare no less real than that of the soldier, no less real although it is a spiritual combat, although it is waged against invisible foes.

And, indeed, the high distinction assigned to soldiers in the Gospels prepares us for this language of the Epistles. We may not, indeed, forget such plain language of our Lord and Saviour as: "If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, but now is My kingdom not from hence;" or His healing the ear of Malchus, on the eve of His Passion, with the warning: "All they that take the sword shall perish by the sword." But there is no mistaking the honour put upon those two heathen soldiers who confessed Him, the one, at Capernaum, as the Lord of nature, and the other, on Calvary, as the Son of God. The Centurion, who was stationed with a small company of men under his command at Capernaum, was apparently not a convert to Judaism, although, undoubtedly, his intimacy with the Jewish elders, and his

generosity in building a synagogue, imply strong attraction to God's earlier revelation. By what steps he had come to think that our Lord could heal His paralysed servant we do not know, but there can be no question as to the thoroughness with which, notwithstanding his pagan antecedents, he owned Jesus Christ as Lord and the Lord of nature. When our Lord offered to visit this Centurion's house in order to work the cure, the Centurion deprecated it on two grounds—he was not worthy of the honour, and the effort itself was not necessary: "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof, but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." If, as an officer, he could be sure of the obedience of his men, Jesus could no less surely command that of the powers of nature. And when the Centurion had expressed this in a soldier's simple language, which we shall have to consider more presently, he was rewarded by the magnificent eulogy which our Lord addressed to those who followed Him: "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." But more signal was the confession of that other Centurion who was in command of the soldiers on Mount Calvary, and of whom we are reminded by the sculpture which now adorns the choir of this Cathedral. Of his antecedents, too, we know nothing. We know nothing of any preparatory struggles towards the light which he may have made before, or at the time; but this we do know, that it was not one of the children of Abraham, not one of the religious leaders of Israel, it was not a priest, not a prophet, not a pharisee, not a scribe, who made the great confession in the presence of the Crucified. "Truly this was the Son of God," was the utterance of a rude warrior whose days had been passed among his heathen comrades in their barrack at the Castle of Antonia, amid the drill, and the military games, and the long intricate disputes with the quarrelsome Jews who lived hard by in Bezeka, and in the valley between the Temple and Mount Zion, and in much else,

it may be, which would have been inevitable in a pagan soldier's life. What an unanticipated, what a signal honour that such an one, standing at the foot of the Cross, should first repeat the truth which is the very heart of the creed of Christendom—that He Who died in shame and pain at the hands of sinners, and for their redemption, is Himself none other than the Son of the Highest!

The relation between the military profession and religion thus traceable in Scripture reappears in the history of the Church. If in her highest moments the Church has done her best to check or to condemn bloodshed, as when St. Ambrose excommunicated the Roman Emperor Theodosius at the very height of his power for the slaughter of Thessalonica, she has distinguished between the immediate instruments of such slaughter and the monarchs or the governments who were really responsible for it. If in the first centuries of the faith Christians were often unwilling to serve in the Roman ranks, and in some cases preferred martyrdom itself to doing so, the reason was that such service was then so closely bound up with pagan usages that to be an obedient soldier was to be a renegade from the Christian faith. When this difficulty no longer presented itself, Christians, like other citizens, were ready to wear weapons and to serve in the wars; and so long as warfare is defensive, devoted, not to the aggrandisement of empire, but to maintain the peace and the police of the world, the Christian Church, while deploring its horrors, cannot but recognise in it, at times, a terrible necessity. When the great bishop, Leo of Rome, or the great soldier, Charles Martel, set their faces against the destructive inroads of barbarism, they had behind them all that was best and purest in Christendom. And the rise of the Military Orders, the Knights of the Temple and the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, marks a yet closer intimacy—the form of which was determined, no doubt, by the ideas of the twelfth century rather than of our own—between a

soldier's career and the profession of religion. We cannot pass that noble home of the Law as it is now, the Temple, without remembering that it was once tenanted by an Order of soldiers, bound by religious obligations, devoted to the rescue and the care of those sacred spots which must always be dearest to the heart of Christendom. Until the closing years of the last century, it was universally assumed that the dreadful charges on the strength of which the Templars were put to death, and their estates were forfeited, had really been established, and that the suppression of the Order, if disfigured by needless cruelty, was substantially an act of justice. Even so late a writer as Dean Milman, although strongly inclined to do so, hesitates altogether to acquit the Templars. But the most recent investigations, especially in Germany, leave no doubt whatever of their innocence. The Order, in whose establishment the great St. Bernard took pleasure, and whose rules he himself so largely framed, was a real, and, on the whole, a noble endeavour, to combine, in one man, the Christian and the soldier. And perhaps, in the whole history of Christendom, there is no more tragical crime to be found than that by which—in order to gratify the avarice of an unscrupulous King, aided by the authority of a weak and interested Pope—the order was abolished. In our own day we are familiar with purely missionary organisations, both within and without the Church, which take the name of “armies,” and which would invest the good which they attempt, or which they achieve, with such appeals to the imagination as are made by describing their proceedings in military language. This is not the place, or the time, to discuss their work, but the form which it takes is another, and a recent, illustration of the relations which Christians have always felt to exist between the career of a soldier and the life and work of a Christian.

Here, then, let us ask ourselves the question : What are the qualities which are common to a good soldier and to a

good Christian? The answer will explain, and will justify the language of the Epistle.

The first is that each, the Christian and the soldier, does his work well in the exact degree of his devotion to his commander. The greatest generals have been distinguished by the power of inspiring an unbounded confidence in, and attachment to, their persons. This is true in different senses of Alexander, of Hannibal, of Cæsar, of Napoleon. Of Hannibal and Napoleon it is especially true. It compensated to the former for his great inferiority in numbers during the long struggles which he carried on unsupported against the power of Rome: it was not forfeited by the latter, although his reckless expenditure of life in his military operations was almost unparalleled. The strength of a general is the attachment of his men, and the strength of an army attachment to their general. When this exists there is no waste of time and thought in discontented criticism, no hesitation between the receipt of an order and obeying it. Nay, even if the commander be mistaken, the confidence which he inspires will often go far, by the very enthusiasm which it creates, to cancel the effect of his error. To have unbounded confidence in his leader, to be willing to follow him anywhere, at any moment, is practically the first virtue of a soldier. And is it otherwise with a Christian? What is the deepest secret of the Christian life if it be not an unbounded confidence in the Captain of our salvation, Jesus Christ our Lord? Devotion to His person, undoubting belief in His word, readiness to do and to endure whatever He may order—that is to be a practical Christian. One of the earliest professions of this loyalty by one who perhaps had not weighed the full meaning of his words, but who yet unknowingly expressed the true Christian temper, is: "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." The Commander-in-chief of Christendom deserves this whole-hearted devotion. He, our Captain, has Himself personally grappled with the enemy;

He has overcome the world ; He has spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly as He hung upon the Cross ; He has through death destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and so has delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For those who believe in Him, it is an obvious duty to trust and follow a Leader Who has Himself thus borne the brunt of the conflict, and Who, while He gives His orders, extends His generous care and help to the very last and weakest straggler in His vast host. Certainly a Christian is a good soldier in the degree with which he is mindful of the distinction and of the obligations which attach to wearing the uniform of Jesus Christ.

The second virtue in a soldier is courage. In the conventional language of the world, a soldier is always "gallant," just as a lawyer is "learned," just as a clergyman is "reverend." Whatever be a man's real character, the title belongs to him by right of his profession. There are virtues in which a soldier may be wanting, without damage to his professional character, but courage is not one of these. Not to be at his post in the hour of danger for any reason short of a distinct call of duty elsewhere, or sheer bodily weakness, has ever meant, for a soldier, professional ruin. The one quality in which he must be above suspicion is his character as a brave man. No doubt courage, as a soldier possesses or requires it, is often largely a physical excellence, pre-supposing a certain nervous organisation in the body, as well as the tenacity and unyieldingness of will in face of danger ; but in its higher forms it is felt to be something more than physical, since it involves a complete subjection and sacrifice of the physical instinct of self-preservation to a felt, present, and moral necessity for effort or for resistance. And this sublimer aspect of the quality it is which men have honoured as something altogether distinct from the courage of an animal, as a virtue which asserts in man's complex nature the decided

superiority of the will or character. From Thermopylæ to Balaclava history presents us with not a few examples of this great quality, which almost make us forget the dreadful character of war itself in the spectacle of the moral elevation of which those who take part in it may sometimes be capable. Now courage is scarcely, if at all, less necessary to a good Christian than to a good soldier. Certainly the Christian needs and employs a distinct variety, so to put it, of the virtue. The courage which he mostly needs is moral rather than physical, passive rather than active courage. But it is not therefore less really courage. He cannot, indeed, without disloyalty to the law of Christ, return evil for evil, or blow for blow; he must let the man who has taken his cloak take his coat also; he must turn the other cheek to the assailant who has smitten the one. This may at first sight appear to belong to a moral ideal which has nothing to do with courage, which is in fact very poor-spirited; but, side by side with the precepts to give way where selfish interests only are at stake, are the precepts to resist unflinchingly where principle is concerned, where anything that touches God's truth or God's honour is in question. It was observed with surprise in the early days of Christianity that the same men whose meek, unresisting bearing provoked the jests and the taunts of their Pagan critics were absolutely fearless when they were summoned at a moment's notice to choose between offering a little incense to the statue of the Cæsar or dying by a death of torture. And indeed moral courage does not always go hand in hand with physical courage. You may meet with men who would, without a second thought, lead a storming party to the breach, but who quail before the polished ridicule of a club or drawing-room, even when they have no doubt whatever of the truth or of the excellence of that which has provoked it, and no particular respect for the persons from whom it proceeds. Courage is, at least, as much needed by the soldier of Jesus Christ as by the soldier of the Queen, if he would vanquish,

first of all, himself, his own passions, and then, in his Master's name, the world around him. And what is the secret, the spring, of this courage? Not, believe me, in the long run, natural doggedness or pluck, but reliance on a higher and protecting Power. It was an ancient warrior who exclaimed: "Blessed be the Lord my Strength Who teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight; my Hope, and my Fortress, my Castle, and my Deliverer, my Defender in Whom I trust, Who subdueth my people that is under me. Though a host of men encamp against me, yet shall not my heart be afraid, and though there rose up war against me, yet will I put my trust in Him." And, if God is the secret of physical, much more is He of moral courage. Moral courage in a Christian may be almost said to be based upon those words of our Lord, "Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but fear Him Who, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you fear Him." It is based too on the certainty of God's present help. "Thou, therefore, my son," writes St. Paul to Timothy, "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." "I can do all things," he assures the Philippians, "through Christ that strengtheneth me;" and of these same Philippians he desires to hear that "with one mind they are striving together for the faith of the gospel;" and he adds: "in nothing terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a manifest token of perdition, but to you of salvation and that of God." Have we not all of us received the equipment of Divine assistance when we were devoted to Christ in our baptism? Let us ponder the familiar words: "We receive this child into the congregation of Christ's Church, and do sign him with the sign of the Cross." Why? "In token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner, against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end." Certainly, if the Christian life means anything at all, it means a life of courage.

And a third excellence in a soldier is the sense of discipline. Without discipline an army becomes an unmanageable horde, one part of which is as likely as not to turn its destructive energies against another. And nothing strikes the eye of a civilian, as he watches a regiment making its way through one of our great thoroughfares in London, more than the contrast which is presented by the unvarying, I had almost said the majestic, regularity of its onward movement, and the bewildering varieties of pace and gesture, direction and costume, of the motley crowd of curious civilians who flit spasmodically around it. Discipline in an army is not merely the perfection of form, it is an essential condition of power. Numbers and resources cannot atone for its absence, but it may easily, with small resources, make numbers and greater resources powerless. We Englishmen naturally think of the squares at Waterloo, but, in truth, the lesson is written in large characters in all history. What discipline meant for that great people, whose arms enabled it to impose its laws and its language on the ancient world, and to whose work we modern men—whether we know it or not—are in a thousand ways so largely indebted, we learn from the words of that Centurion of Capernaum whom we have already had before us. When the Centurion would profess his faith in our Lord's power over the forces of nature, he naturally bethinks himself of the discipline of the Roman legion, with which from his early manhood he has been familiar. Before his soldier's mind there rises the picture of the legion with its six tribunes—"chief captains" they are called in our version—commanding it by turns, with its subdivision into ten cohorts, each of which was in turn subdivided into three maniples, while these again each contained two centuries, bodies which should have consisted of one hundred men, but which practically sometimes nearly sank down to fifty. He himself was in command of one of these centuries, there in Capernaum, and his thought travelled to the cohort which was

always in those days stationed at Jerusalem, and then again to the head-quarters of the Roman army of occupation in Cæsarea. He knew how perfect was the order which still prevailed in the forces that had subdued the world. "I," he exclaimed, "am a man under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say to this man go, and he goeth, and to another come, and he cometh, and to my servant do this, and he doeth it." Himself under superior officers, he knew what it was to obey; having soldiers under him, he knew how his commands were obeyed. He could not doubt, in view of his own experience, that the powers of nature which were under the orders of Jesus Christ would obey His word. His habit of mind, accustomed by turns to obedience and to command, and capable of command because accustomed to obey, was already, as Tertullian said of the human soul, naturally Christian. For surely discipline is not less a Christian than a military virtue. St. Paul thinks of that great movement of the soul, faith itself, as yet obedience. His pregnant phrase, "the obedience of faith," illuminates his idea of its real character; and the Epistles abound in warnings against any "who walk disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye have received of us Apostles." Christians are warned to "obey them that have the rule over you, and to submit yourselves, for they watch over your souls as they that must give an account." And the precept is very comprehensive which rules that "all things should be done decently and in order." There is of course this difference between the discipline of the Church of Christ and that of the army, that the former requires a moral, not less than an outward and mechanical, compliance with its prescriptions. When indefensible claims have been put forward of Church authority, or flagrant evils have displayed themselves in the Church's practical system, the revolt of the Christian conscience which will take place for the time being is fatal to discipline. So it was at the Reformation, which involved the rejection of an usurped authority; so, to a certain extent, it is now, when

our final courts of appeal in cases of doctrine and discipline cannot be defended on the lines of Christian principle.

But, further, it must be owned that the temper of modern Christians of itself very frequently makes discipline more difficult than has been the case in former days; the sense of personal responsibility, which is so valuable an ingredient in the true religious life, has been exaggerated into forms of religious self-assertion on the part of individual men or groups of men; that this self-assertion has become inconsistent with what St. Paul calls "the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." The common Church is shattered into a thousand sects, the common faith of Christendom tends more and more to be resolved into a multitude of separate views as numerous as are the individual minds which entertain them. Even with our own portion of the Church we must admit that we are very far from obeying the apostolic rule in the matter of discipline; that we have in this matter much to learn from the army.

And one more characteristic of military spirit is the sense of comradeship. All over the world a soldier recognises a brother in another soldier. Not only members of the same regiment, of the same corps, of the same army and country, but even combatants in opposing armies are conscious of a bond which unites them in spite of their antagonism; and the officers and men of hostile armies have been known to engage in warm expressions of mutual fellowship as soon as they were free to do so by the proclamation of peace. This generous and chivalrous feeling which survives the clash of arms confers on a soldier's bearing an elevation which we cannot mistake. When in the later years of his life Marshal Soult, who had been in command on the Peninsula, visited this country, he came to St. Paul's Cathedral, and the monument which most interested him, and which then had been recently erected in yonder south transept, was that of General Moore, the hero of Corunna. Soult, says one who witnessed it, stood for some time before the monument; he could not speak, he could hardly control himself, he

dissolved into a flood of tears. Certainly it was meant to be so in the church. "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if you have love one towards another." And so it was with the Church in the main, though with some admitted and noticeable exceptions, in days when the heathen could exclaim, "See how these Christians love one another!" If it is not so now, at least on such a scale and so generally as to witness for Christ and to impress the unbelieving world, let us Christians each take shame to himself for his share, whatever it be, in so serious a failure. But this, at any rate, we know—that brotherly kindness is at least as much a rule of the Church as of the army, and that now, as heretofore, there are not a few Christians who do their very best to obey it. But violations of the law of love, as indeed of all laws, have, from the nature of the case, a publicity which is denied to its wider and its sincere observance.

These observations, my friends, apply to all forms of military service, but the presence of our London Brigade in St. Paul's to-day makes one more observation necessary on the subject of the Volunteer movement. There are, as it seems to me, more reasons than one why the Volunteer movement should be looked upon with interest by those who have at heart the interests of religion. It not only adds greatly to the strength of the country, and so indirectly to whatever religious effort is associated with the well-being and with the enterprise of England throughout the world; it strengthens the country without involving those drawbacks which, from a moral point of view, are more or less and inevitably associated with large standing armies. A volunteer force, while capable of rendering invaluable service in the defence of the country, cannot easily be employed, like the great armies of the Continent, for the furtherance of an aggressive or an ambitious policy. And, moreover, the volunteer is a soldier who does not thereby cease to be a civilian; and if this should be held to imply any sort of professional inferiority—a point upon which I obviously

could not venture an opinion—it is not without decided moral advantages. The conscripts who made up the vast hosts which the first Napoleon poured across Europe from Madrid to Moscow were young men, taken from their homes almost in boyhood, and necessarily exposed to the mischiefs which the early removal of domestic influences surely involves. And, if those evils are now greatly lessened by a system of shortened service, they cannot be held to be altogether done away with. The Volunteer soldier lives not in barracks but at home, and he secures the moral bracing which the effort and the discipline of a soldier's life confers without forfeiting those aids to religious consistency, to personal purity, to unselfishness of life, which the duties and the restraints of home always more or less imply. But this does not mean that he escapes that sacrifice of time, and, in many cases, of health, which military service often exacts; and the widows and the orphans of our Volunteer force have a claim upon the charitable assistance of the country all the more emphatic in that the time and toil of their departed relatives have been unremunerated except by a sense of duty.

But let us, at any rate, be sure of this—that the chief virtues of a soldier are also in their substance the virtues of a Christian. Loyalty to our chief, courage in the discharge of duty, obedience to discipline, a brotherly feeling for all comrades—these constitute a common ground between the soldiers of the earthly and of the Heavenly army. At no time has the army of this country been wanting in men of all ranks who have afforded great examples of all that is courteous and gentle, as well as resolute and unyielding in the Christian character; and, indeed, the good soldier is always in a fair way, to say the least, like the Centurion Cornelius, to become a good Christian, while the good Christian as such cannot but cherish the virtues which are the excellence of the soldier. But there is an important difference between the services—the one ends, if not before, yet certainly and altogether at the moment of quitting this

earthly scene ; the last possible point of contact that even a Wellington can have with the profession of his choice is seen in the devices on his coffin, in the epitaph on his grave ; the other service, that of Jesus Christ, although under changed conditions, lasts on into that world to which death is but an introduction, and which He, our Captain, has opened to us by His death on the Cross, by His Resurrection from the dead. Let us recognise in ourselves, or in others, the high honour which must always attach to the man who wears the uniform of the Queen ; but let us also endeavour, whether we happen to wear it or not, to be, or to become, each one of us, while we may, a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

HUMAN HISTORY AND ITS LESSONS.*

“ We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what Thou hast done in their time of old.”—PSALM *xliv.* *i.*

WHY, my brethren, does this verse fall upon the ear as one of the most familiar in the Book of Psalms ? Think for a moment, and you will remember that with a very slight alteration it occupies a prominent place in the Church Litany. We may pause to ask why should it be in the Litany at all, for the Litany is a long series of supplication for blessings present and future, general and personal, temporal and spiritual. Our Church of England Litany is a late, and perhaps it is the most perfect and beautiful, sample of a large class of devotions which in earlier ages abounded in the Church, and which seem to have taken their rise in those dark and anxious days which accompanied and followed upon the break up of the Roman empire. Then, when almost every province was a scene of rapine and of slaughter, of “ battle, of murder, and sudden death ” ; then, when life and property were everywhere insecure, when social order seemed to be threatened on all sides with collapse,

if not with return to barbarism ; then, when in addition to these evils "plague, pestilence, and famine" were widely abroad, each destroying its full tale of victims, and when the material misery of the people seemed likely to bring in its train the withdrawal of such small blessings as they had, and even in some cases the fierce ungodliness of despair ; then it was that in their agony holy souls turned towards God, sought to enkindle the souls around them, not by the set, formal prayers, beautiful as they were, of our earlier ages, but in sharp, passionate ejaculations, such as men might spontaneously utter amid the ruins of a falling world. Our Litany was drafted at the time of the Reformation from earlier compositions of this kind, and it maintains its generally supplicatory character throughout with a simple and emphatic exception. After the collect for assistance in "troubles and adversities," and against the evils wrought by the "craft and subtlety of the devil or man," there is an entreaty that God would "arise, help us, and deliver us," first for His "name's sake," next for His "honour." But between these two solemn adjurations there comes in the verse of the Psalm, "O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have declared unto us the noble works that Thou didst in their days, and in the old time before them." It is, you observe, an appeal, if we may reverently say so, to the historic consistency of God, and in full confidence that it will not be made in vain ; or rather, as if its object had already been attained, it is followed by the *Gloria Patri*. "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost," the loftiest utterance of our thankful acknowledgment to the Fountain of all goodness, before the stream of supplication is resumed.

This verse then, I say, is, properly speaking, not a prayer at all. It is an act of acknowledgment and praise, and we find the reason for its occurrence in the Litany in the drift and history of the Psalm from which it is taken. The forty-fourth Psalm probably was written at a time and under circumstances

not unlike those which some centuries later created the Litanies of the Christian Church. It was composed, we know, by one of the sons of Korah—a family which descended from that Korah who had led the rebellion against Moses and Aaron, and who, at a later age, held a prominent position in the Temple choir; and it probably belongs to those dark times which immediately preceded the great and final catastrophe of the Babylonish captivity. We live over those times as nowhere else in Holy Scripture in the pages of Jeremiah. Everything was pointing to some coming disaster; there was failure abroad, there was misery at home. It looked as if the work of Moses, of David, of Elijah, had had its day; as if Israel had at last done for the world all that it had to do; as if the great Pagan empires of the East were about to close over Israel's ruins. At such a time, the hearts of thoughtful and religious men turned back upon the past of Israel, upon all that God had done for Israel under the Egyptian bondage, and in the years which had followed it. Was He not the same God? Was not Israel the same people? Would He be, could He be, inconsistent with Himself? Surely it was enough to remind Him of His mercies in the past, and then to be certain that the future would in some way not be unprovided for. "O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us what Thou hast done in the time of old."

Since human history is a record of the ways and will of God we may explain what at first appears to require explanation—the large amount of human history to be found in that volume which we Christians believe unveils God's mind, the Bible. Just let us think over the books which are purely historical—much of the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the two Books of Samuel, the Books of Kings, the Books of Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, the Acts of the Apostles; we need not add the four records of that one life on earth which was unlike any other that ever was lived, or books like Jeremiah, Jonah, or the Epistle to the Galatians, which contain much historical

matter without being wholly historical. But why should so large a proportion of the volume which reveals God be taken up with the ways and works of man, unless it is true that in His conduct and control of man God conspicuously reveals Himself, and that what He has done in this way in past ages enables us to forecast His will in the future? Therefore it is that when we look forward we say with the Psalmist that each generation, our own like the rest, should hand on its experience to the children of the generations to come, to show the honour of the Lord, His mighty and wonderful works which He hath done; and therefore if we look backward we say with the apostle that whatsoever things were written aforetime, historical chronicles not less than spiritual and moral truths, were written for our learning. History has a distinctly religious use as showing how God works and what He is. But here we are met by a school of thinkers who deem it a weakness to waste any attention upon the past at all. "We," they say, "are men of progress; we live for the future. The past of the world is only its childhood. Why should you fondle the guesses and the experiments which were the best things that were open to the infancy of the race? The future is to embrace the manhood of humanity. Let us forget the past. Let us look forward. Those who have no part in our foremost science, in the freshest enthusiasms of the men of to-day, may well pass their lives amid ruins and chronicles; they are only the owls and the bats who haunt the relics of a dying civilisation. But the world moves on nevertheless, and to do one's part in it we must be progressive, and to make progress is to turn one's back upon the past." My brethren, is this so? Is it possible thus to divide the life of humanity into two hemispheres, and peremptorily to reject one of them as entitled to no respect or attention? Is the hoped for, is the unknown, alone worthy of your thought? and is the known, the ascertained, the recorded, to be dismissed as useless for all practical purposes? Surely this view

of matters will bear the inspection of common sense as little as it can stand the judgment of revelation, for common sense tells us that what we know yields the best material for guidance into the region of the unknown, and Scripture says in many ways and words that history is God's teaching in the past which should prepare us for doing His will in that portion of the future which may belong to us. Surely this notion of forgetting the past in the interests of the future, this progress which is too eager, it would seem, to take any lessons from experience, is but a narrow and one-sided prejudice at the best, excusable only, if it be excusable at all, in those moments of excitement when men are awakening from an insensibility to what is before them, and think to revenge themselves on one false state of mind by committing themselves unreservedly to another.

My brethren, there are two main reasons which practically make history so precious at all times, but especially at times of public or private anxiety or distress, and the first is that, looking to the records of the past, we are taken out of the present—that is to say, we are taken out of ourselves. Clear, true thought and right action are often so difficult because if we live only in the present we move, so to say, in a cloud of dust. The persons around us, the circumstances around us, the engrossing interest of the moment, disturb, confuse our view of things as they are, exaggerate the importance of such and such an incident, lessen the gravity of this or that fact. But if we get up out of the present into history, that is to say, into the past, we are no longer thus embarrassed; we are like travellers who have been climbing a hill that rears its summit right above the mist, and enables them to survey a long track of distant country; the passion which belongs to interest and action at the moment is gone; we survey the past almost, if not quite, with the clear-sightedness of impartiality, although the past brings us the same problems as the present in other hands and under other circumstances. In short, the history

of our race, or any part of it, is experience without the drawback of passion, and how can we better learn than from experience if the judgment be undisturbed.

History then, I say, takes us out of the overclouded and the fluctuating present; it throws us back into the past, and the past, remark, the past is also the unchanging. History is a lesson in human nature, and human nature for one thing does not change. Men live and die, generations succeed each other, but the common nature which they share remains in its leading features from age to age what it ever has been. For human nature is now what it was in ancient Palestine, in Greece, in Rome. Habits, languages, moods of feeling, the range of experience and of knowledge—these have changed, but man remains the same being,—the same in the passions which agitate, the same in the principles which guide, the same, all but the same, in the language and the actions which unveil him; and regenerate nature, too, is what it was substantially in St. Paul, in St. John, in St. Augustine. The intervening ages make no difference here the same difficulties have to be encountered, the same methods avail, the same motives are at work. History is a record of the unalterable character of human nature, whether invested or illuminated by the grace of God; and if history only took us back to the unchanging elements in man it would not help us much. It does more, it places us face to face with the infinite and eternal God. "I am Jehovah, and change not." In His dealings with men, no less than in His own inaccessible and adorable essence, He, too, is the same; in His providence to us-ward, in His own uncreated and awful life, too, there is neither variableness nor shadow of turning. All beneath His throne may be, it is to all seeming, perpetual flux, but the waves which through days, and years, and ages lash the base of the granite plinth do not impair its form or its consistency. And what God has been to us men we know from history; we know, then, from history what He will be to us.

Now to apply this there are three departments of human life in which this recurrence to the past is of great religious value.

First there is the family, resting on God's own ordinance, springing out of the most intimate and sacred ties that can unite human beings. Every family has its traditions as well as its hopes. We all see this in the case of those families which in the course of God's providence are invested with wealth and power, and so attract the gaze of men. To a royal or noble family the traditions of the past are among its most valued possessions. To be the descendant of the Pharaohs or of the Cæsars, to be—to come nearer our own home—the heir of the Plantagenets or of the Courtenays, is to inherit a past of which every educated man feels the magnificence and the power. But then that which is so conspicuous in the case of those who live as it were upon the height of history is not less true of hundreds of thousands who lead humble, undistinguished lives at the base of society. Just as the truest nobility of soul is a thing altogether independent of social position; just as the finest and the loftiest characters are to be detected, not seldom but frequently, beneath roughness of speech, and hard hands, and fustian jackets, so the family, the home and school of the purest and the choicest virtues, is no monopoly of the great; it exists, perhaps, on the whole in a purer, because in a less artificial, form in the cottage of the working man, just as it did at Nazareth. And every family has its traditions of the past—has its encouragements and its warnings, its splendid memories of devotion and virtue, and too often its skeletons in the cupboard. And all this is part of the providential teaching intended for each member of the family. When a boy is told that so many generations ago one of his ancestors did something noble or generous; when he is told that but for the misconduct of such and such a member of his race his family would be in a very different position from that which it now occupies; when he is bidden to imitate this or that excellence in his father, or avoid such and such a defect

which is recorded, it may be, of his great-uncle ; he is brought in this way under the play of a series of very powerful motives, which are part of the predestined discipline, depend upon it, to which God subjects him—and a very valuable part too. He is taught to trace God's doings in the time of old amongst those human beings who have handed on to him his name, his character, his physiognomy, his very flesh and blood ; to see that amid the humblest and commonest tissue of domestic circumstances—births, marriages, failures, successes, illnesses, deaths—the same Divine hand was present which shapes the destiny of empires, and rules the suns and the stars. There is an institution, as I may venture to call it, more common, I fear, in the last generation than in our own ; more common, certainly, in country districts than it is in large cities ; more common too, alas ! in humble life than in the households of the great—I mean the family Bible. Surely it is a beautiful and precious custom to keep in every household one splendid copy of the Divine Book, throned reverentially upon a shelf apart when it is not being reverentially used, throned there as the choicest treasure of the family ; and then to inscribe in its first vacant pages each step of God's awful and loving providence within that dwelling, each birth, each marriage, each death, bringing these things thus out of the world of common incident into the courts of the Temple, and laying up a store of reflection and instruction for the generations to come. As we bend over such a Bible as that, a precious heirloom, it may be, of those who used it, and who are now, we trust, with Christ, crowded with names which suggest nothing to others, but which are full of varied and precious memories to us their descendants, how natural is it to exclaim out of the fulness of the heart, "O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us, what Thou hast done in the time of old."

And then there is our country, and here we have to remember what we too often forget, that God shapes the destinies

of every nation just as truly as He did that of Judah and Israel. No doubt the Hebrew people were favoured from time to time with tokens of His active and restraining hand, which He does not, so far as our observation goes, vouchsafe now, although no one who sincerely believes Him to exist can say reasonably that such tokens are impossible at any time or place whatever. The Hebrews felt God's presence in their history much more vividly than we do; they saw and they adored His power where we fix our gaze exclusively on the human and material agencies which He employs. Nevertheless, history is not less in England than in Palestine a revelation of the ways of God; and there have been times in our English history when this has been felt in the agony of hope or of fear which a great national danger will produce. Such a time was the threatened invasion by the Spanish Armada. Such again was the crisis of the struggle with the first Napoleon, which preceded Trafalgar. We who live in these quiet times can scarcely understand how our forefathers were then thrown back in very deed upon the protecting arm of God, how they felt that if any was to save them He must. And how this belief in His presence and aid nerved them at the crisis of the struggle against faint-heartedness and indecision, and bound their hearts together, with a sacred strength, in love to their country and to Him, their God. In losing sight of this we surely to-day have lost a something which invigorated—ay, and purified—the lives of Englishmen in bygone days. There is, of course, a narrow and false patriotism which closes up men's hearts against men of other races and nations, and which would re-erect those middle walls of partition, as the apostle calls them, between the different sections of the human family which the cross of Christ was meant to break down; but there is also a false cosmopolitanism which, under the guise of a sympathy that is to be wide as humanity, declines the duties, the sacrifices, the interests which are due to those with whom God in His providence

has thrown us into nearer fellowship, our fellow-countrymen. True patriotism is never narrowing to a man's best sympathies, but it does undoubtedly suggest sooner or later specific sacrifice and work. It should be part, I venture to think, of every young Englishman's education, to trace God's hand in the annals of his country, to see amid its dangers and its triumphs, in its temporary failures, in its consistent advance, in the gradual development of its institutions, and the extension of equal rights and advantages to all classes of people, without those revolutionary shocks which have desolated other lands, His hand who of old led His people through the wilderness like a flock, and brought them out safely that they should not fear, and overwhelmed their enemies in the sea. It should, I say, be part of every man's religious, as well as his general education, to learn to scan the annals of his country till he can with sincerity and fervour exclaim with the Psalmist, "O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us what Thou hast done in the time of old."

And then there is the great and sacred home of souls—the Church of Jesus Christ. At all times I apprehend the life of the Church in the present has been a life of battle and of controversy. It could not well be otherwise, considering what human nature is on the one hand, and what, on the other, Jesus Christ came to make of it. But men often sicken, weary of the strife, and hands hang down and knees grow feeble now as under the eye of the apostle; and the children of Ephraim being harnessed and carrying bows, turn themselves back in the day of battle, and better and braver men than they long to be where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." And at such a time the annals of the Church of Christ may be to many a soul a mighty revelation of the faithfulness and presence of God; and much, too, how much! is lost to Christians by their wide-spread ignorance of Church history. It is a history, no doubt, chequered by some dark pages of human passion. It is a record at times of serious

corruptions, of gross mistakes, even of great crimes ; still above all, and through all, there is the felt splendour and force of that Sacred Presence which came down at Bethlehem to give a new life to man, and which shone out to all the ages from the cross of the redemption as a complete unveiling of the heart of God. Church history is a vast treasure-house of sacred experience, well fitted to encourage the desponding, to determine the wavering, to put down with a firm hand the suggestions of selfish doubt, to kindle up in many a soul great enthusiasms for truth and goodness. They lose much, I repeat, who know little or nothing of it, who know not what it is to stand in spirit at the side of martyrs like Ignatius and Polycarp, to follow the mental anguish of Augustine which precedes his conversion, to do justice to the sanctified intellect, to the dauntless courage of Athanasius, when he is struggling with an apostatising world. And these are but samples of a great army which follows them, and in watching them, as it seems to me, we escape from the pettinesses, from the perplexities, from the despondencies of the present into a higher and purer atmosphere ; we catch from these great souls something of their devotion to our adorable Master, something of their fervour, of their grace, as we exclaim, with deepest reverence, "O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us what Thou hast done in the time of old."

And if any should say to me, "What has all this to do with personal religion?" I reply, it has a great deal to do with personal religion ; for personal religion is not worth much if it does not enable us to do our duty the better as members of our several families, as citizens of our common country, as members of the Church of God. It is the religious use of the past which largely enables us to do this ; and those who, in the sense of Christ's redeeming love, and in the hope of a better life hereafter, are eager day by day to express their gratitude and their hopes in faithful service, will not neglect anything that makes such service easy and welcome.

But this is not all. It is God in history which makes history for a Christian so encouraging and instructive, and thus, in turning reverently to the past, we are where God Himself would place and keep us, close to Himself, our own, our personal

“ . . . help in ages past,
Our hope in years to come ;
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.”

THE HOUSE OF PRAYER.

“And He went into the Temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought : saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer ; but ye have made it a den of thieves.”—LUKE xix. 45, 46.

DURING the course of His short earthly ministry our Lord Jesus Christ twice cleansed the Temple of the traffic that took place within its courts. St. John describes the first occasion, which he places just after the wedding at Cana in Galilee, when our Lord went up to Jerusalem to keep His first Passover after His entrance on His ministry ; and the second occasion is narrated by the three first evangelists—by St. Matthew, perhaps, most fully, by St. Luke, as in the text, most briefly. This last occasion took place immediately after the public entry into Jerusalem ; as St. Mark's account would seem to imply, on the following morning. The close of the ministry of the Son of man was to be marked by a solemn act corresponding to that at its commencement.

And here let us observe in passing, that it is impossible to treat the narrative in St. John's, as referring to the same event as that described by the three first gospels, without supposing that the fourth evangelist had, for purposes of his

own, torn away this episode from its true place at the close of our Lord's life, and placed it at the commencement. Those who have gone so far as to maintain this, contend that it is very improbable that an event of such marked character should have twice occurred within a short lifetime; but not to insist on the unwisdom of settling beforehand what was or was not likely in such a life as our Lord's, let us observe that the action itself, and the language used by our Lord, are reported to have varied very significantly on the two occasions, while the recurrence of the circumstance which provoked our Lord's act on the first occasion would have led Him to repeat it on the second. He could not without inconsistency condone at the close of His ministry what He had rebuked at its opening. Just as similar cases of disease led Him more than once to repeat a miracle, just as similar faults or errors or forms of ignorance in His hearers led Him to utter in a late discourse words which He had already employed in an earlier one, so when in full view of His approaching death, He beheld within the Temple courts the same unhallowed traffic which had met His eye in the first year of His ministry, He acted in the main as He had acted before; He drove the buyers and sellers from the sacred precincts; and those who believe that every event, the least as well as the greatest, in the life of the Son of God upon earth was pre-arranged for the instruction, for the edification, of the world will feel that this solemn repetition of an act of severity and judgment shows it to have some very emphatic lessons which it is our duty to consider.

The occasion presented itself, as I have said, naturally. Arrived at Jerusalem, our Lord, it has been well observed, once more treads the path, which He loved as a child, up to the Temple. In the outer court He finds a brisk trade going on around Him. Nothing is said on this occasion of the sale of oxen and sheep for sacrifice, which St. John mentions at the earlier date; but there were stands of doves, much in

request for trespass, for sin, for burnt-offerings, since the poor were allowed to present them instead of the costlier lamb or kid ; and there were the money-changers, who must have had very constant occupation, for any Israelite, in whatever station of life, when he had passed the age of twenty, was bound by the law to pay half a shekel into the sacred treasury whenever the nation was numbered, and the tax seems, in the course of time, to have become annual. This tribute had to be paid in the exact Hebrew half-shekel, worth about fifteen pence half penny of our money, and the premium upon the exchange of foreign money for this sum was a coin which was worth about three halfpence. But the money-brokers of our Lord's time had no notion of contenting themselves with this small commission. Jews came to them from all parts of the world who were obliged to make their offering in the Hebrew coin, and they only supplied the necessary half-shekel for the largest sum that, after driving a bargain, they could possibly exact. It was these fraudulent brokers, no doubt, who chiefly moved our Lord's indignation. He passed rapidly along the court, upsetting their tables, money and all, one after another. He then overturned the dove-stands, and finally, by the mere exercise of His moral authority, He drove the whole company of bargainiers, buyers and sellers alike, out from the Temple courts ; and in doing this He appealed, as to a word of decisive authority, to an utterance of the great prophet Isaiah, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations." "Instead of that," He sternly rebuked, "ye have made it a den of robbers."

In contemplating this action we are at first sight startled by its peremptoriness. "Is this," we say to ourselves—"is this He who is called the Lamb of God ? He of whom prophecy said that He should neither strive nor cry ; He who said of Himself, 'Come to Me ; I am meek and lowly of heart' ? Is there not some incongruity between that meek and gentle character and those vehement acts and words ?" No, my

brethren, there is no incongruity. As the anger which is divorced from meekness is but unsanctified passion, so the false meekness which can never kindle at the sight of wrong into indignation, is closely allied, depend upon it, to moral collapse. One of the worst things that the inspired Psalmist can find it in his heart to say of a man is, "Neither doth he abhor anything that is evil." Bishop Butler has shown that anger, being a part of our natural constitution, is intended by our Maker to be excited, to be exercised upon certain legitimate objects; and the reason why anger is as a matter of fact generally sinful is, because it is generally wielded, not by our sense of absolute right and truth, but by our self-love, and, therefore, on wrong and needless occasions. Our Lord's swift indignation was just as much a part of His perfect sanctity as was His silent meekness in the hour of His passion.

We may dare to say it, that He could not, being Himself, have been silent in that Temple court, for that which met His eye was an offence first against the eighth commandment of the Decalogue. The money brokers, we have seen, were habitually fraudulent; but then this does not explain His treatment of the sellers of the doves, which shows that He saw in the whole transaction an offence against the first and second commandments. All irreverence is really when we get to the bottom of it unbelief. The first great truth that we know is the solitary supremacy of the Eternal God; the second, which is its consequence, the exacting character of His love. God is said, in the second commandment, to be a "jealous God." In a man jealousy, impatience of rival claims, impatience of a divided love in another, is, as we know, anything but lovely or moral; and one reason for our condemning it is that no one human heart has in justice any right to the undivided homage of another heart. Of course I know that on certain occasions people use passionate and exaggerated language which might very well imply the contrary; but

in morality and fact no man, no woman, may claim all the affections and thoughts of any other man or woman ; but that which is a grave fault in a finite and created being like man is anything but a blemish, it is a strict moral necessity, in the Divine character. God has, while man has not, a literal right to the undivided homage of His creatures. As the end no less than the author of our being, as containing within Himself all perfections, as being the highest, the consummate good, God has a right to not a part, but the whole affection of every reasonable being that He has created. He would disclaim His own affection if He could claim less than the whole. His exacting love, which has wandered forth from the glories of heaven to the cradle of Bethlehem and to the cross of Calvary in quest of the soul of man, would be untrue to man's best interest, no less than to its own beauty and supremacy, if it could consent to share its claims on the human heart with any creature whatever. And this was the deepest meaning of our Lord's protest against the traffic in the Temple. Though that traffic seemed to have a semi-religious purpose, it was in reality irreligious. It was, you observe, the substitution within those walls of another interest for that interest of which the Temple was the symbol and the guardian. "My house shall be called a house—not of commerce, not of semi-sacred commerce—but of prayer. It has for its object Me, and Me alone. Ye are robbing not merely your fellow-creatures of their substance, but Me of My glory. Ye have made it a den of thieves."

Brethren, the application of this action and language of our Lord must detain us a little longer. "My house shall be called the house of prayer." The Jewish Temple is, in the Bible, first of all a figure of the whole church of the redeemed. The faithful St. Peter says, "Our spiritual house." They are Christ's house, says St. Paul, over which as the Son He is set. "Ye are the temple of God." St. Paul says plainly to the Corinthians, "The temple of God is holy ; which temple

ye are." Of this spiritual house, Christ is the chief corner-stone ; the apostles and the prophets are the foundation ; and day by day, and year by year, souls are being built into its walls, or, in Scripture language, edified ; and when its predestined proportions have been attained then the end will come. This vast organised edifice of souls to which all ages and countries of the world, the living and the dead, alike contribute, touches us in the shape of the militant or visible church, which is only, you observe, a fragment of a mighty whole that stretches back into the past, that stretches away into the unseen. "Ye are come," says the apostle, by being Christians—"ye are come," at your conversion, not merely to such and such congregations, bishops, pastors to meet your eye ; but "ye are come unto Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven ; to God, the Judge of all ; to the spirits of the just made perfect ; to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant." And of this house it is true that "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations." For this it was constructed, as its leading idea and purpose, the maintenance of a vast and an uninterrupted communion with the eternal source of life.

And this is as true of that portion of the holy body which we call the Church visible or militant as it is of the rest. The object of the visible Church is not solely philanthropic, although the Church's duty is to do good unto all men, specially to them that are of the household of faith. It is not solely the moral perfection of its members, although the purification to Himself of a peculiar people zealous of good works was certainly a main object of its founder ; still less is it the prosecution of inquiry or speculation, however interesting about God, because we already know all that we ever really shall know in this state about Him. We have on our lips and in our hearts the faith that was once delivered to the saints. This temple,

visible and invisible, is thus organised by its Divine founder throughout earth and heaven to be a means of ceaseless communion with God ; and as its heavenly members never, never for one moment cease in their blessed work, so by prayers, broken though they be and interrupted—by prayers and intercessions, by thanksgiving and praise, private and public, mental and vocal, the holy Church throughout the world doth acknowledge Him who is the common centre of light and love to all its members, whether on this side the veil or beyond it.

Into this temple also there sometimes intrudes that which moves the anger of the Son of man, for this spiritual society has its place among men. It is in the world, although not of it, and it thus sometimes admits within its courts that which cannot bear the glance of the All-Holy. And especially is this apt to be the case when the Church of Christ has been for many ages bound up with the life and history of a great nation, and is, what we call in modern language, established—that is to say, recognised by the State, and secured in its property and position by legal enactments. I am far from denying that this state of things is or may be a very great blessing, that it secures to religion a prominence and a consideration among the people at large, which would else be wanting to it, that it visibly asserts before men the true place of God as the ruler and guide of national destiny ; but it is also undeniable that such a state of things may bring with it danger from which less favoured churches escape. To be forewarned, let us trust, is to be forearmed ; but whenever it happens to a great church, or to its guiding minds, to think more of the secular side of its position than they think of the spiritual—more, it may be, of a seat in the Senate and of high social rank than of the work of God among the people ; if, in order to save income and position in times of real or supposed peril, there is any willingness to barter away the safeguards of the faith, or to silence the pleadings of generosity and justice in deference

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to some uninstructed clamour—then be sure that, unless history is at fault as well as Scripture, we may listen for the footfalls of the Son of man on the outer threshold of the temple, and we shall not long listen in vain. Churches are disestablished and disendowed to the eye of sense, through the action of political parties, to the eye of faith by His interference who ordereth all things both in heaven and in earth, and who rules at this moment on the same principles as those which of old led Him to cleanse His Father's Temple in Jerusalem.

"My house shall be called the house of prayer." Here, too, is a law for the furniture and equipment; here is a definition of the object and purpose of a material Christian church. There are great differences, no doubt, between the Jewish Temple and a building dedicated to Christian worship; but over the portals of each there might be traced with equal propriety the words, "My house shall be called the house of prayer." No well-instructed, no really spiritual, Christian thinks of his parish church mainly or chiefly as a place for hearing sermons. Sermons are of great service, especially when people are making their first acquaintance with practical Christianity, and they occupy so great a place in the Acts of the Apostles, because they were of necessity the instrument with which the first teachers of Christianity made their way among unconverted Jews and heathens. Nay, more, since amid the importunities of this world of sense and time the soul of man is constantly tending to close its eyes to the unseen, to the dangers which so on every side beset it, to the pre-eminent claims of its Redeemer and its God, sermons which repeat with unwearying earnestness the same solemn certainties about God and man, about the person, and work, and gifts of Christ, about life and death, about the fleeting present and the endless future, are a vital feature in the activity of every Christian Church, a means of calling the unbelieving and the careless to the foot of the Cross, a means of strengthening

and edifying the faithful. Still, if a comparison is to be instituted between prayers and sermons, there ought not to be a moment's doubt as to the decision ; for it is not said, "My house shall be called a house of preaching," but "My house shall be called the house of prayer." Surely it is a much more responsible act, and, let me add, it is a much greater privilege, to speak to God, whether in prayer or praise, than to listen to what a fellow-sinner can tell you about Him ; and when a great congregation is really joining in worship, when there is a deep spiritual, as it were an electric, current of sympathy traversing a vast multitude of souls as they make one combined advance to the foot of the eternal throne, then, if we could look at these things for a moment with angels' eyes, we should see something infinitely greater, according to all the rules of a true spiritual measurement, than the effect of the most eloquent and the most persuasive of sermons.

"My house shall be called the house of prayer" is a maxim for all time, and if this be so, then all that meets the eye, all that falls upon the ear within the sacred walls, should be in harmony with this high intention, should be valued and used only with a view to promoting it. Architecture, painting, mural decoration, and the like, are only in place when they lift the soul upwards towards the invisible, when they conduct it swiftly and surely to the gate of the world of spirits, and then themselves retire from thought and from view. Music the most pathetic, the most suggestive, is only welcome in the temples of Christ, when it gives wings to spiritualised thought and feeling, when it promotes the ascent of the soul to God. If these beautiful arts detain men on their own account, to wonder at their own intrinsic charms, down among the things of sense ; if we are thinking more of music than of Him whose glory it heralds, more of the beauty of form and colour than of Him whose Temple it adorns, then be sure we are robbing God of His glory, we are turning His temple into a den of thieves.

No error is without its element of truth, and jealousy on this point was the strength of Puritanism, which made it a power notwithstanding its violence, notwithstanding its falsehood. And as for purely secular conversations within these walls, how unworthy are they in view of our Redeemer's words! Time was, under the two first Stuarts, when the nave of the old St. Paul's was a rendezvous for business, for pleasure, for public gossiping, so that Evelyn the diarist, lamenting the deplorable state to which the great church was reduced, says that it was already named a den of thieves. Is it too much to say that the Redeemer was not long in punishing the desecration of His temple? First there came the axes and hammers of the Rebellion, and then there came the swift tongues of fire in 1660, and the finest cathedral that England ever saw went its way. Would that in better times we were less constantly unmindful of the truth that its successor is neither a museum of sculpture nor yet a concert-room, and that He whose house it is will not be robbed of His rights with permanent impunity.

"My house shall be called the house of prayer." This is true, lastly, of every regenerate soul. When it is in a state of grace the soul of man is a temple of the Divine Presence. "If any man love Me, and will keep My words, My Father will love Him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him." Christ's throne within the soul enlightens the understanding, and kindles the affections, and braces the will, and while He thus from His presence chamber in this His spiritual palace issues His orders hour by hour to its thinking and acting powers, He receives in return the homage of faith and love, a sacrifice which they delight to present to Him. So it is with God's true servants, but alas! my brethren, if you and I compare notes, what shall we say? Even when we desire to pray we find ourselves in the outer court of the soul surrounded all at once with the tables of the money-changers, and with the seats of the men who

sell the doves. Our business, with all its details, follows us in the churches, follows us into our private chambers, follows us everywhere into the presence of our God. Our preparations for religious service, the accidents of our service, occupy the attention which is due to the service itself. Sometimes, alas! we do not even try to make the very first steps towards real prayer, and steps which ordinary natural reverence would suggest; we lounge, we look about us, just as though nothing in the world were of less importance than to address the Infinite and Eternal God. But sometimes, alas! we do close the eyes, we do bend the knee, we try to put force upon the soul's powers and faculties, and to lead them forth one by one, and then collectively to the footstool of the King of kings; when, lo! they linger over this memory or that, they are burdened with this or that load of care, utterly foreign to the work in hand. They bend, it is true, in an awkward sort of way in the sacred presence beneath, not their sense of its majesty, not their sense of the love and the beauty of God, but the vast and incongruous weight of worldliness which prevents their realising it. And when a soul is thus at its best moments fatally troubled and burdened about many things, God in His mercy bides His time; He cleanses the courts of a temple which He has predestined to be His for ever, He cleanses it in His own time and way; He sends some sharp sorrow which sweeps from the soul all thoughts save one, the nothingness, the vanity of all that is here below; and so He forces that soul to turn by one mighty, all-comprehending act to Himself, who alone can satisfy it; or He lays a man upon a bed of sickness, leaving the mind with all its powers intact, but stripping from the body all the faculties of speech and motion, and then through the long, weary hours the man is turned in upon himself; and if there is any hope for him at all, if at that critical moment he is at all alive to the tender pleadings of the All-merciful, he will with his own hands cleanse the temple; he sees the paltriness of the trifles that have kept him back from his chiefest, from his only good; he expels first one and then another unworthy intruder upon the sacred ground. The scourge is sharp, the resistance it may be is persevering; the hours are long, and they are weary, but the work is done at last. "No chastening for the present seemeth joyous, but

grievous, yet at the last it bringeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby."

Let us, dear brethren, pray for grace lest we should need this scourge; let us pray for grace that, if we do need, we should welcome it. If religion means anything at all, it is an awful, it is an absorbing reality; if attention to its duties have any claim upon our powers, that claim is far too serious to admit of rivalry or of interruption. Let us be sure that, in this solemn matter, what is worth doing at all is worth the very best effort that we can possibly give it; and that, for the rest, if we earnestly ask Him, God will so cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit, that even here we may perfectly love Him and worthily magnify His holy name, through Jesus Christ.

CHRIST'S DEMANDS.

"And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them."—MATT. xxi. 3.

You will remember, brethren, that these words formed part of the instructions which our Lord addressed to the two disciples whom He desired to take the necessary measures for His solemn entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. They were to go into the village over against them, no doubt into Bethphage; and there they would "find an ass tied, and a colt with her." These they were to loose and to bring to our Lord. If any remonstrance was made, they were simply to make a reply which, as they were instructed, would put an end to further resistance or discussion. "If any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he shall send them." It may, perhaps, at first occur to some of us that this incident is too incidental, too subservient, with propriety, to the great entry into Jerusalem, itself rightfully to occupy a main place in our thoughts on a day like this, but it will appear, I trust, as we proceed, that this apprehension is not well grounded; we are, in fact, not

good judges of the relative importance of words and acts in a life so altogether above and beyond us as is that of our Lord Jesus Christ. In such a life our common notions of what is of first importance, and what is only secondary, do not apply, at least with anything like certainty; it is safest to assume that on this sacred ground nothing is incidental, nothing is subsidiary, nothing is unimportant. It is at least possible that the charge to the disciples which preceded the public entry has as much to teach us as the entry itself; at any rate, we may observe that of the more obvious lessons which it suggests there are three which appear very markedly to claim our attention.

Our Lord's words, then, illustrate first of all the deliberateness with which He moved forward to His agony and death. When He sent the two disciples for the ass and the foal which were tied up in the street of Bethphage, He was, as He knew, taking the first step in a series which would end within a week on Mount Calvary. Everything, accordingly, is measured, deliberate, calm. He first brings into play His power of immediate prophecy,—of prophecy, that is to say, directed upon an object in the near future which could not have been anticipated by the exercise of a man's natural judgment, just as He did a few days after when He told the disciples to follow a man bearing a pitcher of water, who would show them the way to the room prepared for the last supper. He already sees the ass and the foal in the street of Bethphage and He sends for them. That He should contemplate riding at all is remarkable; there is no earlier or later notice in the gospels of His moving from place to place, except by walking. To walk was the symbol of His poverty, and of His independence. Now, however, He will ride upon an ass, and there is reason for His doing so. He sends for the ass and the foal because the prophet Zechariah introduced these animals into his description of the coming of the King of Zion to His own city, and in a prophecy which the Jewish interpreters from the first and without any visitation applied to the Messiah. In ancient days the sons of judges rode on white asses. The ass was used by Ziba, by Shimei, by Mephibosheth, by Ahithophel, by David's household, by the old prophet of Bethel. David himself and the sons of David rode on mules, as it would seem to mark their royal station without altogether deserting the

earlier tradition. Absalom in his rebellion introduced chariots and horses. Solomon brought thousands of horses from Egypt. The appearance of the horse, familiar to the Assyrians, to the Egyptians, even to the Canaanites, as a feature of the state and apparatus of the Jewish kings, marked clearly the rise of a monarchy which aped the fashions, and would fain have rivalled the power of the great pagan monarchies of the East. The horse is in the Prophets the symbol of worldly power. "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem," is a prediction of the fall of the worldly monarchy. The ass fell into discredit as the new heathen ideal of royal splendour was increasingly accepted, so that in the last days of the Jewish monarchy the burial of an ass was a proverb for a disgraced end like that of Jehoiakim. There is no recorded instance of a king of Judea or of Israel riding on an ass. That the King Messiah should come to Zion, riding on an ass, meant for the Jewish people that He was to have a kingdom not of this world, that He was to be a Prophet King whose outward bearing should of itself recall those ancient days in which the Lord Himself had been Israel's King, the days which had preceded the establishment of the monarchy; and hence observe the great amount of attention which was fixed on this particular passage of Zechariah by the Jewish interpreters, hence our Lord's care for its literal fulfilment. Men have often asked why the two animals were wanted, and they have observed that St. Mark and St. Luke speak only of the colt. The answer is, not that the foal, not yet broken in, might behave more quietly when its mother was beside it, but that the prophetic passage of Zechariah, so dear to the memory and the imagination of the Jewish people, might be rendered before their eyes into a realised picture. Zechariah's redundant language does plainly speak of two animals; not merely of one, and, therefore, our Lord sent for two. The two animals were symbolical—the disciplined ass under the yoke, and the wild, unbroken colt, each had its meaning. The ass itself, unclean, ignoble, debased, drudged, as the Jews deemed it, what was it but a picture of unredeemed man, enslaved to his errors and to his vices? But then, within the human family the Jews had been under the yoke and the law, and were so far broken in; while the undisciplined heathen were like the wild, unbroken colt. It was thus essential to

the full meaning of our Lord's action that He should ride first on the one animal and then on the other, while the whole circumstance of the entry on the part of Zion's King as conceived of in Zechariah was preparatory to Zion's deliverance through suffering. When, therefore, our Lord sent for the ass and the colt, He solemnly entered upon the group of associations which prophecy had traced around His passion; it was the beginning of the end, it was the first step in the procession to the Cross. "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, meek and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass."

With most men, as we know, it is otherwise; they think that their houses shall continue for ever, and that their dwelling-places shall endure from one generation to another, and call the lands after their own names. During the years of health and strength human nature still, as of old, whispers to itself, "Tush, I shall never be cast down, there shall no harm happen unto me." And when this is no longer possible, how often do we put off the thought of death? We try to disguise from ourselves its gradual approach; we do anything in our power to postpone it; we diet ourselves, we change the air, we give up, if we can, our more exacting employments; we struggle against what we feel to be the inevitable, we hope against hope. There have been in many, if not in all, generations noble exceptions to the rule; men who, knowing what they were doing, have gone forth to meet death armed with a strong sense of duty, or inspired by a heroic resolve. Such was the old heathen Roman, whose name was dear to his countrymen for many a century; who, when he was sent back as a captive from Carthage to recommend a discreditable peace, and with the knowledge that his failure would entail on him a death of torture, deliberately advised them to reject the proffered terms. And such have been soldiers who have volunteered for a forlorn hope; doctors who have perhaps within our own knowledge undertaken duties which they know must cost them their lives; Sisters of Mercy who have nursed cholera patients and laid them out for burial when their nearest relatives have deserted them in terror; in these and in like cases the moral glory of our Lord's voluntary and deliberate suffering rests in its measure on our human weak-

ness; the great difference is that with Him there is no trace whatever of the pressure either of immediate outward circumstance, or of sudden heroic impulse from within. He knows that He is going to die, and He gives His orders just as quietly as though He were still sitting at the marriage feast of Cana. He might at any moment withdraw Himself from the tempest of insult and of agony that will presently be poured on Him; but His heart is established and will not shrink until He sees His desire upon those spiritual enemies—sin and death, whom it is His mission to subdue. The twelve legions of angels are there; they are waiting. He has but to summon them; but though He already sees and feels in its minutest detail all that is before Him, He sends into Bethphage for the ass and the foal. It is this deliberateness in His advance to die, it is this voluntariness in His sufferings which, next to the fact of His true divinity, gives to the death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ its character as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. If it was to be the offering, not merely of an immaculate body, but of a perfectly resigned and holy will, the victim must say at each stage of it, "A body hast thou prepared me;" "Then said I, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." And this is what our Lord does throughout. This is the motive of His last utterance on the cross. "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend My Spirit;" this is the motive of the very first measure He takes when entering on the preliminaries of His sufferings, and sending into Bethphage in obedience to Zechariah's prophecy for the ass and the foal.

And our Lord's words illustrate, secondly, the exact nature of His claims. "If any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them." No doubt the owner of the animals had work for them to do; in any case, the animals were his; and yet here is a demand at first sight not unlike the requisitions, as they are called, of an invading army, when might becomes right, when the ordinary rights of property are swept aside at the bidding of a hostile superior force, when men have to furnish provisions, lodgings, horses, carriages, furniture, equipages under pain of suffering the extremities of war if they refuse. Here, too, in its way was a requisition, "Ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them and bring them unto Me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he

will send them." Now, what is the justification of this demand? A modern German Socialist writer traces here a right, of those who are in want, to help themselves out of the possessions of their well-to-do neighbours, and he laments in an eloquent passage the false refinement of our days, when the disciples would have been at once arrested and charged with thieving before the nearest magistrate. This writer's idea is that our Lord was really what would now be called a communist, and that He claimed the ass and the foal as really belonging to the community of which he was a member, and, therefore, by implication to Himself. This account of the matter would ill accord with our Lord's solemn proclamation that He came not to destroy the moral law, but to fulfil it. He certainly did not abrogate the words, "Thou shalt not steal." And yet the eighth commandment is unmeaning, unless property, in the sense of private property, is a moral right. You cannot steal, properly speaking, that which belongs to no man in particular, and on which everyone has an equal claim. The community of goods described in the early part of the Acts of the Apostles was a very different thing from communism; it was the fruit of the spontaneous action of Christian charity; it rested upon the voluntary surrender of their private rights by the first Christians; and three and a half centuries later, St. Augustin describes a similar state of things in his own household at Hippo.

Every man who entered it voluntarily subscribed a declaration by which he disposed of his property in favour of a common fund which supported them all, and any one of them who, after this, claimed to be the owner of any sort of property, was expelled from the community. But this, like the life of the first Christians, was a very different thing from the communism which denounces property as immoral, and which would confiscate it to public purposes whether its present owners will or no. Property, it might be shown, if this were the time and place to show it, property is not an arbitrary and vicious product of an effete civilisation; it is an outcome of forces which are always at work in human nature and life; it is a formation, it is a deposit which human industry is always accumulating; it is an original result of the terms on which men, at once industrious men and free men, live together as members of society. It has its duties, no doubt, as it has its

rights. Its duties are not merely matters of choice, any more than its rights are matters of sentiment; but if property is in any sense imperilled, if communism is ever destined to get the upper hand in this our modern Europe, it will be because the holders of property have thought only or chiefly of its rights, and have forgotten its duties. Nevertheless, while its rights may for high moral purposes be surrendered voluntarily, they are rights which may be retained and insisted on, and they cannot be violated without doing violence to the very nature of things, without, in Christian language, breaking the eighth commandment of the Decalogue.

And this, therefore, brings us back to the question of the principle on which our Lord claimed the ass and foal tied up in the street of Bethphage. It is a question which can only be answered in one way—namely, that Christ was all along the true owner of the ass and the foal, and that the apparent owner was but His bailiff. “The Lord hath need of them.” How would the owner of the animals have understood this reply? We cannot doubt from the general tenour of the narrative that the owner was in some sense a disciple; that Christ foresaw not merely the presence of the ass and the foal in the street of Bethphage, but the state of mind of the person to whom they belonged, and that by the “Lord” the owner of the ass would have understood the Lord Messiah—not merely, observe, Messiah the Master, but Messiah the Lord, not here merely the Son of man, His own favourite designation of Himself, but the Lord, the word being employed, no doubt, in the original passage which was used of the Lord Jehovah.

“The Lord hath need of them.” He claims what He has lent for a while; He resumes that which has always been His own; we hear the voice of the Being to whom man owes all that he is, and all that he has, “whose we are and whom we serve.” Certainly, my brethren, this claim of our Lord’s implies His divinity, but it is, let us observe, a very modest claim when compared with others which He made on those who heard Him. To ask for a man’s cattle is little compared with asking for his affections, for his thoughts, for his endeavours, for the surrender of his will, for the sacrifice of his liberty, for the abandonment, if need be, of all earthly happiness and of life itself. And yet nothing less than this

was meant by the warning that a man may have to hate father and mother, and wife and children, for Christ's sake, and the Gospel's ; nothing less than this, surely, by the stern sentence, "No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God ;" nothing less than this by the peremptory command, "What is that to thee ? follow thou Me." Christians, at any rate, if they are still Christians, can only feel and express surprise at our Lord's requiring the ass and the colt, if they have forgotten altogether what He asks of themselves as a condition of all true discipleship ; and this throws any claim upon their property entirely into the shade.

At this season, indeed, we think of our Lord's claims upon us less in the light of His Divine person than in that of His redeeming work. He has a right to make these claims not merely as our Lord, but as our greatest benefactor ; not merely for His having created us by His power, but as having redeemed us by His love. Assuredly in these solemn days on which we are now entering He does not claim our service chiefly as the Infinite and the Eternal ; He claims it as the Incarnate and the Crucified. Has He, then, no right to some return for those thirty-three years of humiliation and toil ; for that long agony of soul and body in which those years ended ; for those sufferings so various, so violent, so subtle, so protracted, above all, so voluntary, for a tragic death, the incidents of which seem to plead to the true Christian heart ?

"This, this have I borne for thee ;
What doest thou for Me ?"

No, it is not exaggeration, it is simple Christian feeling resting its eye upon the Cross of the Divine Redeemer, which sings—

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small ;
Love so amazing, so Divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

And if conscience whispers to you or to me that He has need of something which we have not yet given Him of our substance, of our time, of the work of our hands or of our brains, is it possible that we can hesitate as to the answer ?

And, thirdly, our Lord's words show how He can make use of all, even of the lowest and the least ; nay, how

in His condescension, He makes Himself dependent on them for the fulfilment of His high purposes. It was of the ass and of the colt at Bethphage that He Himself said, "The Lord hath need of them." What was the need? Was it that He was too tired at this particular time to ascend the Mount of Olives on foot, or that He desired, in going to meet the multitude who were eagerly waiting for Him, to be raised high above the accompanying crowd of the disciples? These were very subordinate motives of the need, if they were elements of it at all; He wanted the ass and the colt, as we have seen, that He might enact before the eyes of the people the literal fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy. This ass and colt, insignificant in themselves, had become necessary to our Lord at one of the great turning points of His life; they were needed for a service unique and incomparable, which has given them a place in sacred history to the very end of time. They were to be conspicuous features in that great sacrificial procession, for such it was, in which He, the prime and flower of our race, moved forward deliberately to yield Himself to the wills of men who to-day can shout, "Hosanna!" and who to-morrow will cry, "Crucify!" The needs of God. It was surely too bold an expression if He had not authorised us to use it. We might well shrink from implying that anything is necessary to Him who is alone complete in Himself, and is the source of all that is. And yet, there they stand, the words, "The Lord hath need of them;" He needed that ass and that foal in the street of Bethphage.

We ask ourselves with a touch of impatience, could He not have done without them? In one sense yes, in another sense no. He might beforehand have so ruled matters as to make their service unnecessary; He might, so we may reverently suppose, have originally inspired His prophet to colour that picture of the future somewhat differently, to throw into another form those predictions whose behests in a future age He would Himself obey. But when the prophetic word had once gone forth, it could not return to him empty. Prophecy being in Zechariah's mouth what it was, the true Messiah could not but obey it. The ass and the colt might count for little among the villagers of Bethphage, but they had a necessary place marked out for them in the passion of Christ, a place and a work on that first Palm Sunday which higher,

nobler, more intellectual beings than they could not have supplied, or undertaken—the needs of God.

My brethren, if anything is necessary to carrying out His purposes, it is because He has made it so. He gives laws to the world of nature, and lo! there arises some particular physical necessity as we call it; that is to say, to speak plainly, God's necessity that some condition should be obeyed in order to meet the exigencies of some particular law. Health, for instance, has its appointed conditions; they cannot be set aside without miracle. God has made health depend on food, on exercise, on air, and we may dare to say that He needs these conditions in order to secure it to His creatures. In like manner God has made human society depend for its well-being and coherence upon the maintenance of certain principles and rules, and then a state of things presents itself in which some man or some transaction or some course of events is necessary if those rules and principles are to be maintained, and if society is not to go to pieces.

And, once more, He has made the strength and continuance of the Christian life depend on an inspired Bible, on an organised Church, on the preaching of the faith, on duly administered sacraments. Whether any part of this provision might have been otherwise consistent with the great purpose of redemption, it is now too late to inquire. God's declared will is that they should be necessary, and thus it seems we find Him constantly in need of poor, feeble, human instruments in order to give effect to His own high purposes of grace and mercy. "The Lord hath need of them." Whether it might have been otherwise it is not for us to ask; our business is to take note of what is, of those needs of God which He Himself points out to us. The needs of God! Yes, and what is much to be remarked is that He often needs those whom we think, if we were in His place, could easily be dispensed with. We measure Him by our own standard of experience; we know that we habitually depend on intellect, on ability, on wealth, on social power, and that we do not want the unintelligent, the feeble, the poor, the uninfluential; we are, whether consciously or not, anthropomorphic in our conceptions of the needs of God. If we had been on the throne of heaven some eighteen hundred years ago we should, in our stupid way, have hoped to convert the world by

gaining the good graces of rulers of men like Tiberius, or Nero, or of literary men like Tacitus, or Seneca ; we should have taken small account of the fishermen of Galilee ; but with Him it is otherwise. The difference between the highest intellect, and the narrowest and the feeblest, is as nothing, because it is a measurable distance when compared with the distance between what we call the highest intellect and the Eternal mind. The difference between the strongest and the weakest of the sons of men is as nothing when compared with the distance that parts the strongest from the Almighty strength of the Creator ; and He constantly reminds us of this by exhibiting Himself not as needing the great forces which, to us, seem to direct events, or to reconstruct, or to uphold society, but the humble, the feeble, the half-perceived, the unseen agencies which are taken no account of by that ordinary human estimate of human things which passes for wisdom. Yes, "the Lord hath need of them." Let none hereafter say, "What shall God want with me—a mere unit among the millions of the human family ? Without resources He raises up great men to carry out His purposes, but I am too insignificant, too remote from the scene and the capacity of effective action to contribute anything to a cause, to a world, to a Church, that is what it is because He has willed it." No, brethren, the Lord has need of thee, though thou wilt not believe it. He might, if need be, originally have dispensed with thee ; He might have left thee out of the group of influences which were to work His will in thy day and generation. Thou canst not penetrate the secrets of His predestination. He needs thee ; if it were otherwise thou wouldst not exist—for some service great or lowly, trivial or magnificent, which none else but thou canst do ; some service which will not be done, at least as He has designed it, if it be not done by thee. God's abstract power of dispensing with each of His creatures, or with all of them put together is one thing ; His actual plan of governing the world as expressed in forces of events amid which we live is quite another. In fact, he does not release Himself, except upon critical occasions, from the empire of His own rules and laws, and if this or that agent to whom He has assigned some special work or service drops out of His place, the omission is not supplied by miracle ; the work is left undone ; the immediate, though

not the ultimate, purpose of the Creator is frustrated. And if this is an awful, it is surely still more a consolatory thought. Numbers of persons are so oppressed by the idea that they are of little use to anything or anybody, that God has no work for them to do, that they belong to the waifs of the moral world, and not to its legitimate and productive substance. Let them think, when this gloomy thought takes possession of them, of the ass and the colt of Palm Sunday. For all of us, for the weakest and the humblest, there is a place and a time for special service to be rendered sooner or later to the Eternal King who condescends not merely to expect but to need it. For that hour you and I have been created; towards that hour we have been tending, consciously or unconsciously, during the years of life; and at last it comes; perhaps it comes and it passes, perhaps it never repeats itself. Happy if we are only ready to give and to be given to Christ when He deigns to send for us, to contribute our little all to His suffering and triumphant march across the centuries on His errand of benevolence and judgment among the sons of men. May He enable us during this Passion-time to understand the freedom of His atoning suffering. May each one of us yield what we can in answer to His demands upon our love, and be sure that we, too, each one of us, have some work to do in His kingdom—some work which can be done by none other, and which, if it be done faithfully, He will own.

THE MAGNIFICAT.

I. THE FIRST STROPHE.*

“And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.”—LUKE i. 46-48.

No fact is more attested by wide experience, and few facts are more pregnant with significance and warning, than the tendency of the human mind to lose its hold of the sense and power of language, especially of religious language, after constantly repeating it. Words, however sacred, and although prescribed for universal use by the highest of all authorities, and however richly endowed with spiritual meaning, do yet become to us, through the process of constant usage, barren and unfruitful, unless an effort is made from time to time to recover, to reassert in the human mind their original sense and power. So it is even with that most sacred prayer which our Lord Himself prescribed for the use of His disciples. Neither the experiences of our own souls nor the associations of ages which may have gathered round the several petitions of the Lord's Prayer avail to save us from saying it in a thoughtless and formal way, unless we constantly remind ourselves of what it means, what it has meant to millions, what it might mean to ourselves. And as this is true of words which our Lord Himself bids us use, so it is no less true of other inspired words which His Church has selected from the sacred records as being especially suited for constant employment in public worship. It holds good of those Psalms which, like the ninety-fifth, or the hundredth, or the sever

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, August 4th.

Psalms of Penitence, have been chosen for frequent use on account of their spiritual intensity, and even of those three hymns in which the earliest saints of the New Testament heralded the birth of the Divine Redeemer—the Song of Zacharias, or the *Benedictus*; the Song of Simeon, or the *Nunc Dimittis*; and, not least, the Song of Mary, the *Magnificat*.

And it is in view of this consideration that I propose, God willing, to devote the Sunday afternoons of this present month to such consideration as time will permit of the familiar but always well-understood words of this, the first in order and the greatest of all Christian hymns—the *Magnificat*.

There is no mistaking the prominence assigned in the English Prayer Books of the Church of Christ to the Hymn of Mary. It is the heart, the centre of our Evening Service. All else leads up to it, or expands it, or radiates from it. We mount upwards to it by successive steps, by confession of the sins which disqualify the soul for true communion with God in prayer or praise, by the prayer which makes all other communion with God easy and natural, by psalms which express the longings of the soul for some nearer contact with God, or which sadly deplore obstacles to it, or which joyfully anticipate its realisation by some lesson from the Old Testament which, whether it be history or prophecy, narrative or moral teaching, poetry or prose, everywhere and always speaks of Jesus Christ, speaks of Him as the contrast to the human failures or the crown to the human excellences, which it describes as the Heavenly Visitant, who by-and-bye will still man's fears and will warrant his hopes. Now, as of old, unless there be a veil over the heart, in the reading of the Old Testament, the Great Teacher Himself accompanies us through its pages, and, beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounds to us in all those ancient Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

And thus we approach the hymn which proclaims that all for which psalmists and prophets have yearned has in very truth and deed come to be. Mary might seem to stand

evening by evening in the Church of her Divine Son, and in strains in which we shall consider she celebrates an event, compared with which all else in human history is insignificant indeed. As from her thankful heart the incense of praise ascends to the eternal throne, first in one and then in another incensed wreath of almost unrivalled beauty of tint and form, we know that the hardest questions of a man's mind have been answered, and that the deepest yearnings of his heart have been satisfied by the coming down from heaven of the Only-Begotten to be born by a human mother, to die at the hands of His creatures, and to rise again. After this all else may well seem pale and poor, but it is this great truth, set forth or latent in every line of the *Magnificat*, which carries us on to the end of the Evening Service from the second lesson, in which the Incarnate Son speaks to us Himself or by the lips of His apostles; to the *Nunc Dimittis*, in which we take leave of His message with a thankful joy; to the Creed, in which we brace ourselves for the toils and pains of life by a new profession of belief in Him; to the concluding prayer, in which His omnipotent intercession is at once the warrant of our praying at all and of the confidence that we shall be heard, not for our merits, but for His.

It may seem strange that from time to time persons who have felt no difficulty about the use of purely Jewish psalms in Christian worship have been disposed to take offence at the public use of the *Magnificat* or, indeed, of the three Christian hymns which are preserved for us in St. Luke's Gospel. This feeling found expression a few years after the Book of Common Prayer had come into public use. It was objected that unless we could all be in the exact circumstances of Zacharias at the birth of the Baptist, or of Simeon at seeing our Lord in the Temple, or of Mary at the visitation, we have no adequate reason for singing their hymns. This amounts to saying that no hymn or psalm is to be used by any other person than its composer unless the circumstances of the composer himself can be exactly reproduced in the case of the man or of the Church

that uses his hymn. Not to trace the application of this rule to modern and uninspired compositions which are largely in use among us this day, it is obvious to observe that it would forbid any use whatever of the Psalter in public or in private devotion—a use to which, however, oddly enough, the old objectors do not seem to have objected, for every psalm was composed in a single set of circumstances, some of which can, while some cannot, be ascertained, and yet, so far as I know, it has never been contended that because we cannot make these circumstances our own we are precluded from using the Psalms. We are none of us in the position of David persecuted by a jealous sovereign, or insulted and rebelled against by a favourite son, or bringing up the ark to the sanctuary of Zion, or ordering a royal household according to the Divine law. The glories of Solomon, the conquest and humiliation of Rehoboam, the repulse of Sennacherib, the ruin and desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonian conqueror, the sadness of the captives weeping by the waters of Babylon, the laying of the corner stone of the Temple after the exile—these, and many other like subjects or events, are the occasions of the Psalms, which yet we use at this hour to express the fears, or the hopes, or the resolves, or the aspirations of our own souls. Clearly, if such a difference of circumstances is not fatal to our singing Hebrew psalms, it cannot preclude us from using New Testament hymns, which, as Hooker has said, concern us so much more than the songs of David, as the Gospel touches us more than the Law. But, in truth, whether it be Jewish psalm or Christian hymn, we Christians use them because their inspiration lifts them above the limits of the time, the place, the events which witnessed their composition. As a work of real natural genius, whether it be poem, or painting, or speech, or statue, has that in it which detaches itself from the study or the studio of the poet or the artist, and makes it belong to all times and countries, so much more does a work of Divine inspiration bear in it this note of universal applicability. It is independent of places, and events, and epochs, and authorships,

and, indeed of everything save His mind, from whom it proceeds, and that heart and understanding of His creatures who need it and who welcome it.

The *Magnificat*, then, is the hymn of the Incarnation. It was uttered in circumstances the like of which had never before, and have never since, surrounded any human being. Mary had been told at Nazareth by a heavenly messenger that she was to be the mother of Him in whom all God's best promises to Israel and to the human race were to be fulfilled, and she was to be His mother, not in the ordinary way of nature, but as became His pre-existing glory, and as was needed to cut off the entail of evil which came down from the first father of our race. In a new and supernatural way "The Holy Ghost"—so ran the prediction—"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore, also, that Holy Thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Mary knew that she was to be the mother of the Divine Messiah when she traversed the land from Nazareth to a country house some few miles from Jerusalem on a visit to her cousin Elizabeth, the future mother of the Baptist. It was their meeting which was the immediate occasion of the *Magnificat*. Elizabeth had no sooner heard from the lips of Mary the wonted salutation, "Peace be to thee," with which religious Jews greeted each other after a long absence, than under the influence of the Holy Spirit which filled her soul, she broke out into words which mark the high significance of Mary's destiny scarcely less clearly than does her own *Magnificat*. She spake with a loud voice, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb; and whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Elizabeth was the elder woman, and, as the wife of Zacharias, she was in a higher social position than Mary; but few things in her religious history are more beautiful than her ready and unstinted recognition of the higher vocation of her younger relative. "Whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord

should come to me?" The closing words of Elizabeth were at once a blessing and a prophecy, but they touched a spring in the illuminated soul of Mary, and she forthwith uttered her *Magnificat*. She uttered it, as it would seem, at a single jet, but as it passed from her lips it fell, as is usual with Eastern poetry, not of set design, but by an instinct of intrinsic fitness, into divisions of unequal length which we moderns should call "strophes."

Mary begins by offering up to God, with the whole strength and resources of her spiritual being, that praise which she knows to be His due always, and especially in view of the signal privilege that has been vouchsafed to her: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour, for He hath regarded the low estate of His hand-maiden." And then, in a second strophe, she dwells for a moment on the singular and gracious distinction whereby she has been chosen to be the mother of the Incarnate Son. "For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him throughout all generations." But during these moments of thankful exultation her vision has widened to embrace new and larger horizons, and so, in a third strophe, she traces some of the relations of the Incarnation of her Son to the action of God's providence in the history of human nations and human lives: "He hath showed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down princes from their thrones, He hath exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He hath sent empty away."

And then, in a concluding strophe, she traces the great gift which, through her, has been bestowed upon the human race up to its sources in the compassion and in the faithfulness of God: "He, remembering His mercy, hath holpen His servant Israel, as He promised to our forefathers, Abraham, and his seed, for ever."

It has more than once been suggested that such a hymn as this is not the sort of response which it would be natural for us to make in reply to such a congratulation as Elizabeth's, and it is hinted that the composition may be really due to some later writer, whether evangelist or another. Now, upon this it may be observed that "natural" is a term of very varying import, and that what is natural to one person, or people, or age, is far from being natural to another. We have only to look around us to know that persons of different temperaments meet exactly similar circumstances very differently. One man is reserved, and sparing of his words, another is effusive; this man checks his feelings, that man indulges them; one is as literal and prosaic as may be, another almost inevitably expresses himself in the language of poetry. And then the Eastern and the Western nations differ now as they always have differed in these matters. To many an Arab, at this hour, it is perfectly natural to discuss an every-day occurrence in words with the style, and the form, and the rhythm of a poetical composition. That which an European would put into a few words, an Arab would expand into what is virtually a poem, with a rhythmic rise and fall, and with refrains, and repetitions, and appeals to all kinds of higher considerations, not foreign to the subject, but not necessary to its discussion. No Englishman who had just lost his king and his friend would immediately burst out into an effusion such as that in which David laments the death of Saul and Jonathan at Mount Gilboa; but in David's case, as in that of many another Eastern, ancient or modern—the fact of inspiration quite apart—it was perfectly natural to do so. And Mary, instinct with the spirit of prophecy, answers Elizabeth's congratulations in a burst of inspired poetry, based on older words which she had known from infancy, and which she transfigures so as to make them express the fact which fills her grateful soul with wonder and with joy. To measure her utterance by the prosaic rules of our Western temperament is to forget the most obvious laws of equitable criticism. Nor, we may venture confidently to

say, is there any real ground for the surmise that Mary's *Magnificat* was the work of any other than Mary. Like the songs of Zacharias and Simeon, it is something more than a psalm and something less than a complete Christian hymn. A Christian poet living after the death and the resurrection of Christ would surely have said more; a Hebrew psalmist would have said less than Mary says. In this hymn of hers we observe the consciousness of nearness to the fulfilment of the great promises, to which there is no parallel even in the latest of the Psalms, and yet even Mary does not speak of the Promised One as an evangelist or an apostle would have spoken of Him, by His human name, and with distinctive references to the mysteries of His life and death and resurrection. Her hymn was a true native product of the particular moment of transition in sacred religious history, and of no other, when the twilight of the ancient dispensation was melting, but had not yet melted, into the full daylight of the new. Certainly the *Magnificat* is an inspired song. It belongs to the highest degree of inspiration, and yet it does not claim what we should nowadays think an absolute originality. It is, in truth, modelled very largely, although not altogether, on an olden psalm—that which Hannah had sung many a century before at the door of the Tabernacle at Shiloh, when she brought her infant son Samuel, as she said, “to lend him to the Lord as long as he liveth.” Hannah's history had an especial place in the heart and thought of every Jewish woman, not only because she was the mother of the great and austere prophet who may claim, in some respects, an unrivalled importance in the history of the people of revelation, but also because her deferred hopes, her bitter disappointment, the rough handling to which she was exposed, even at the hands of the gentle and weak old man who then held the office of high priest in Israel, had a human pathos that is all their own. At last her hopes were fulfilled, and when, in accordance with the terms of her vow, she consecrated her son, as a Nazarite, to the life-long service of God, her

thankful heart found vent in a hymn of praise, in repeating which every Jewish mother and maiden, from that time forth, associated herself with the sorrows and the joys of Hannah. Listen to Hannah first, and then to Mary, and you will perceive how closely their hymns are related to each other. Each of these inspired women finds her joy in God, each praises God in the exaltation of the humble, in the humiliation of the proud; each closes her song by dwelling on God's fulfilment of His promises. Mary, we see plainly, has reproduced the very ideas, the order of ideas—nay, sometimes the very phrases—of the older hymn, but she has made them subservient to a truth which was seen, if it was seen at all, very dimly across the ages by the older songstress, and which was clear to her herself.

When Strauss characteristically observed that if the Virgin's Hymn had been inspired from on high we might expect more in it of originality, it is not out of place to reflect that the Holy Ghost is not bound to adopt the exact standard of originality which may approve itself to a modern literary man of a sceptical turn of mind. Originality does not always consist and only in the production of new material, new thoughts, new phrases. Originality may discover itself in a high degree of excellence when old ideas and old phrases are enlisted in the service of some newly-proclaimed truth. When in her inspired *Magnificat* Mary draws so largely upon the ancient hymn of Hannah, she is only doing what inspired men again and again had done before her. We cannot read the Bible carefully without noting how psalmist borrows from psalmist, prophet from prophet, and, it might even seem, one evangelist from another—the first object of all the sacred writers being, not the creation or the vindication of a poor reputation for originality, but the clear exhibition of truth through the employment of those precise words and thoughts which are best able to do it justice. The first strophe of Mary's hymn is a burst of praise, and in this praise we may note one or two matters for more especial consideration.

There is, first of all, the fact that in the order of Mary's thoughts the praise of God comes first. To give God His due is not with Mary an afterthought, a decoration, an accompaniment of something else, of something relating to her friends or to herself. In Mary's soul God takes precedence of all else, and therefore in Mary's Hymn the praise of God takes the lead of all other topics. And this, be it observed, is the case, although her hymn is also an answer to the congratulations of a near relative. She is replying to Elizabeth, but she instinctively, inevitably turns the eye of her soul upward, and addresses her first words to God.

Now, let us consider what would, at least in some cases, have been our own course of procedure. You have achieved, let me suppose, some considerable success, or some position of distinction has been conferred upon you; friends surround you with congratulations, some of them conventional, many of them, let us be sure, sincere. Your friends, after an earthly fashion, paraphrase the words of Elizabeth to Mary. They tell you that your success, your distinction, is a gain, is a joy, to them. They associate themselves, by the expression of a warm and intimate sympathy, with your satisfaction and delight; they are honoured, they are decorated, they have succeeded, and been distinguished because you, their friend, have won distinction and success. Now, how do you reply? You begin by thanking them for their kindness. To succeed in a world where no friends are left to express their joy would no doubt be success robbed of two-thirds of its value, and so we sometimes hear the saying pathetically that success and honours have come too late. And so you tell your friends, with perfect sincerity, that their congratulations are as precious, or more precious, to you than anything that has been done by or done to yourself, and that your first thought on this auspicious occasion is the satisfaction which you have thus occasioned them. The first verse of your real *Magnificat*, if it were written out, might perhaps run thus: "My soul doth magnify the kindness and sympathy of my friends, and my

spirit hath rejoiced in the pleasure which I have occasioned them!" Or it may be, frankly, that you give your first thought to yourself. You do not wish to say too much about yourself, but at the same time you will not affect a false modesty. You cannot deny that is the form which a sense of personal merit is apt to take when tempered with some misgivings as to the wisdom of expressing it; you cannot deny that it is a great satisfaction to you that efforts long persevered in without success have at last succeeded, that merits which it might have seemed were entirely overlooked have at last been recognised. You do not wish to dwell too much on the subject, but, on the other hand, your conviction of what you think is the fact, and what you call "a proper pride," compel you to say thus much. With this view you would make the first verse of your *Magnificat* something of this kind: "My soul doth magnify myself, and my spirit hath rejoiced in the efforts or merits which at length have been rewarded as they deserved." But then you are a Christian, or, at least, a Theist. You remember that after all there is such a being as God. If the truth is to be said, you do not perhaps feel Him to be very near to you, but you do not wish to forget Him altogether. If He exists, and you believe that He does exist, He must have something at least to do with everything that goes on, and it is but right that you should recognise this. You recognise it somewhat tardily, and as a thing to be touched on lightly, because, in fact, He is less real to you than you are to yourself—less real to you than your friends are. You would not ignore God, you would not deny His existence, but in many of your moods of mind you think of Him as an idea or a conception, or an atmosphere, rather than as a Living Being. You think of Him as a conception from which man's mind can really subtract something, to which it can really add something as the ages pass. You do not think of Him as a Living Being utterly independent of you, but who is at least as near to you as are the forces which you can measure or touch, about which you can talk to other

men, about which you read in the newspapers. Yes ; He is there, but, as you think of Him, on a distant and dim horizon of your thought, and something must be said about Him, but that something must befit, it seems, your very thin and precarious idea of what He is, and so at last, but with reservations, you say your *Magnificat* after a third fashion : "A certain sense of intellectual fitness leads me to magnify the Lord on this occasion, and I experience a certain satisfaction in admitting that now, as at other times, something may be done for me by a Higher Power than myself."

How pathetically is all this in contrast with the generous devotion of Mary ! No doubt to Mary the joy of Elizabeth was a real joy, and she cannot but have known that by lineage and training she had been prepared for her own high destiny ; but her first thoughts was of Him from whom all else proceeds, both the warm hearts and the kindness of her friends and the gifts, whether of nature or of grace, which she had herself received. God must claim her first acknowledgment, before whom she is as nothing, and yet He, in His condescending mercy, had deigned to visit her as none of His creatures had been visited before. She would only think of the contrast between her nothingness and His magnificence. If she glances at herself for a moment, it is to wonder that she should have been noticed at all by Him, her great Creator. "He hath regarded," not the humility, not the lowly temper ; these graces were undoubtedly hers in a very eminent degree, but she is not thinking of them. The original word will not lend itself to such a sense. "He hath regarded the low condition of His handmaiden." Because the contrast between herself and Him is thus present to her, because she is convinced that she has no claim on Him—absolutely none, that whatever she has received has come from His free grace and gift, she must perforce begin with Him. "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

And then she addresses Him with all the faculties and resources of her spiritual being. "My soul doth magnify the

Lord, my spirit hath rejoiced." "Soul" and "spirit" are not here different names for the same thing. When St. Paul prays that the whole spirit and soul and body of the Thessalonians may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, He does not use two words where one would have sufficed. No doubt both in Biblical and popular language "soul" and "spirit" are sometimes used alone for the whole immaterial part of man, as when our Lord asked, "What shall it profit a man that he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" or when the preacher says that, "The spirit shall return to God who gave it." But when, as here, the words occur together in more or less obvious contrast to one another, they stand for the higher and lower parts of the one invisible part of man which accompanies his body and yet is distinct from it. The soul is nearer to the nature of the body, the spirit nearer to the nature of God: soul is analogous to the higher life of the animals, the animals have nothing at all that corresponds with spirits. Soul is the seat of passion and emotion, of imagination and impulse; spirit—though, as we see in this hymn, it is, like pure reason, capable of sublime joys that are all its own—is the seat of self-measuring and reflective reason, the seat of memory, the seat of deliberate and imperative will. Soul, it is plain, lives not far from the frontier of the things of time and sense; spirit belongs to a sphere above, on which the things of time and sense need never intrude; but between them they include the whole of the incorporeal nature of man, with all its powers. And Mary summons them all, the highest and lowest, the faculties which traverse the world of sense and the faculties which live among the highest and most abstract truths, to the solemn work of praise: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

Are there none of us to whom she might teach a lesson? Some among us might seem to think that a single power of the soul might be told off—like a soldier when sent on a particular errand—to discharge the duty of praise. One man bids his fancy

engage in the work, and another his affections, and another his reason and sense of the fitness of things, and with another his instinct of beauty turns towards the higher horizon—nay, sometimes it may seem as though no mental or spiritual faculty is bidden to engage in praise at all, and Christians who make a serious effort to pray, and who would be shocked to neglect to do so, leave the duty of praising their Creator to their neighbours, or to the choir, or it might almost seem to the organ; and yet what a demand on all the faculties of our being does one such simple and oft-repeated act of praise as, for instance, the *Gloria Patria* make! We say it before we begin the Psalms, we repeat it at the end of each Psalm and each Canticle, except the *Te Deum*. It consists of only two verses; and yet what infinite spheres of thought does it bid us to arouse! Our souls rise first to the Three Almighty Incomprehensible Subsistencies within the being of the God-head: “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost”; and then, remembering that the Eternal Three have ever been and ever will be what they are, our thought reaches backward into an unbroken and forwards into an unending eternity, while grasping for a second at the present, which, as we touch it, has already mingled with the past: “As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.” If any of us should have cause to think that we have paid but scant attention and embarked little or no spiritual effort in this oft-repeated act of praise, let us bethink ourselves of the import of Mary’s *Magnificat*.

And, once more, observe the title under which Mary praises God, “My Saviour.” This designation, as you know, although associated by Christian faith in an especial manner with our Lord Jesus Christ, is much older than the New Testament. It grew naturally out of Israel’s faith in God’s especial and protecting providence. “It is Thou that savest us from our enemies” was the voice of the chosen people from age to age, and the enemies were generally political foes, and the salvation was victory in the field or deliverance from bondage. This outward and temporal salvation was no doubt a religious

salvation also, because Israel was the people of God. The defeat of Israel was the defeat of the cause of God, and the victory of Israel was the victory of that cause. But probably a new impulse was given to the more spiritual meaning of the word by what would have seemed to pious Jews a profane assumption of the title of Saviour by the Pagan kings who, after the death of Alexander the Great, founded monarchies in Syria and Egypt. If henceforth "Saviour" was to be applied to the God of Israel, it could only be in an elevated spiritual sense, and it is in this sense that Mary praises God, not so much as her country's Saviour as her own. Nor can the expression be explained by the clause: "He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden," which assigns, indeed, the motive of Mary's praise, but not the explanation of the title which she gives to God. The honour put on her in the Incarnation might be described by many another name, but it was not her salvation, and if she calls upon God as her Saviour, it is for independent reasons. Unique as was her office, magnificent as were the endowments bestowed on her, singular as were her humility, her purity, her likeness to the Most Heavenly, she had, she needed a Saviour. She does not stand outside the universal law, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Hers is not a soul which finds its way to the courts of heaven without recourse to that "one Name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." There is no intermediate position in the kingdom of grace between the Saviour and the saved; there is one Saviour, and all others—be their rank in the spheres of glory what it may, whatever be the graces bestowed on them—all others are the same. Mary owed, and owes, what she was on earth, what she is in heaven, not less entirely to the merits and the precious blood of her Divine Son than does the humblest Christian among us at this hour; and she offers the best praises that her soul can offer to God, not first or only as manifested in the awful attributes of knowledge or of power, but as her Saviour.

And in this, most assuredly, she is a model for us. It is well, indeed, that we should speak of other aspects of the Divine Nature, each one of which is a fitting object of adoring praise; well that we should give thanks to God for the great glory of His power, His intelligence, His love; but the sense of natural gratitude itself which He has put in our hearts would bid us remember that He has "commended His love to us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." There is much else for which we may bless Him—"for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life," but if we know what, indeed, we are, what has been done, or what yet may be done for us, we shall not only thank Him for those earlier proofs of His bounty, we shall bless Him, "above all, for His inestimable love in the redemption of the world" of our single selves, "by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, for the hope of glory."

II. THE SECOND STROPHE.*

"For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him, throughout all generations."—LUKE i. 48-50.

LAST Sunday we left Mary at the end of the first strophe of her hymn, beginning to disclose the motive that inspired the burst of praise with which she replied to the salutation of Elizabeth. All the powers of her spiritual nature, ranging from the heights of pure thought to the depths of passionate emotion, were engaged, like the tributary members of a great orchestra, in chanting the glory of the Eternal Being, and especially in the character of the Saviour of herself and of the whole race of mankind. But the fact which immediately prompts her song is, that He in whose sight every creature is

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, August 11th, being the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, 1889.

manifest, and “whose eyes are in all the earth, beholding the evil and the good,” has deigned to cast upon her a special glance of profound significance. “He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.” The blood of David flows in her veins, but for some generations the royal race has lived in seclusion, has lived among the poor, cherishing the secret of its high descent, but resigning itself to the destiny which God in His justice and His love had for the time assigned to it. The low social estate of Mary was in her eyes typical of a low spiritual estate, of a condition which could pretend to no excellence or merit in the eyes of God; but He nevertheless had looked upon her in such a fashion that she must needs break out into thankfulness and praise. It may be that her memory was haunted by those words of an earlier Psalmist describing an event which had at least this in common with her own case, in that it was the reversal of a great humiliation: “He taketh the simple out of the dust; He lifteth the poor out of the mire that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of the people.” Of herself she thinks as of the handmaiden, or, to be more exact, the bond-woman of God, a slave who was so simply His property, who could plead no personal rights in arrest of His will. And she—what had He not done for her? Before she goes further she must, out of sheer gratitude, own His bounty, and that she does in the second strophe of her hymn, in which one startling consequence of the high honour that is put upon her, and the source to which it is due, and the sense in which a kindred distinction may be shared by all true servants of God, are successively handled. “Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him, throughout all generations.”

Mary places her finger first of all on one very startling consequence of the honour which is assigned to her as mother of the Divine Redeemer; she would live for ever in the memory of mankind. Elizabeth had said, “Blessed art

thou among women," and Mary, so far from deprecating this high estimate of her privilege, goes considerably beyond it. "Behold," she exclaims, "from henceforth all generations shall congratulate me as blessed." It is true that there are in the Hebrew Scriptures sentences which Mary, when thus speaking, may have had in her mind. Thus, of the birth of Asher, his mother, Leah, exclaimed, "Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed," and the child's name, Asher,—"Happy one,"—expresses the feeling of the mother. And in the Book of Proverbs the children of the virtuous woman, "rise up and call her blessed." And Malachi predicts a day when all things would recognise the blessedness of Israel as having been the people of revelation, the people of God. But there is nothing in these sayings which is really comparable to Mary's unique prophecy about herself, in which she anticipates the judgment, not of some, but of all the generations of living men. "All generations shall call me blessed."

That which must strike us in this language of hers is its boldness. She is sure of that which to ordinary experience seems to lie beyond the range of probable conjecture. She is sure of the future. Average human common sense, looking out upon the future, declares that nothing is probable except the unforeseen; but Mary, she surveys the future, and she has no hesitation about what distant ages will say about herself. "From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

She is sure, first of all, that she will be remembered; and just let us reflect what this means. In every generation of men only a very small minority when dead is remembered at all. A name only lives on in a family for at most some three or four generations, and, if a name is known to a wider circle, it may possibly cherish the memory for a few years, but then it dies off, and the man is forgotten. There are of course some few memories that survive,—rulers of peoples, leaders of political parties, discoverers in art or in science, masters in literature; but you can almost count them on your fingers, and their names, too, when a century or two has gone by,

are often enough on their way to pass into the general oblivion. Even though they should linger awhile in the note-books of students or on the shelves of libraries, as a rule, all soon pass. A human life drops, like a pebble, into the ocean of eternity, and for a moment there are ripples on the surface, growing fainter and fainter, as the circles widen, and then, so far as this world is concerned, the life which has passed from sight is as utterly forgotten as though it had never been lived at all.

“ Men fade like leaves, they drop away
Beneath the barren shade,
Others again succeed, but they
Are in oblivion laid.

“ So spake the sire of Grecian song ;
Through each succeeding age
The words are caught and borne along
By poet, saint, and sage.”

This, I say, is the rule, but Mary is confident that she will be an exception to it. She is to all seeming but a poor Syrian peasant girl, and yet she dares to predict that this ordinary law of forgetfulness of the dead will be suspended in her favour. Remember that as yet nothing has outwardly happened to warrant her confidence. No Apostle has been called to Christ, no miracle has been worked by Christ, no one has yet heard of Christ's resurrection, or of His Sermon on the Mount. Nay, Mary's Divine Son has not yet been born into this world of sense and time. She has only the angel's promise to fall back upon, but she is none the less sure that it is a warrant that she will live on in the memories of men to the very furthest limits of time.

But Mary is not only sure of a place in the memory of men : she knows that as she is remembered she will be congratulated on her blessedness as long as her memory shall last. Reflect here that when a memory survives, it often is only to be associated with a very different judgment from that which was once accorded to it. A time comes when all who knew

a living man or woman have passed away, and the dead can only be studied in documents, such documents as may chance to be still in existence, and then a reputation is cast into the crucible of what is called "criticism," which constantly, under the guise of scientific impartiality, ministers to the passions or the prejudices of the contemporary world. Criticism, indeed, is sometimes just. It destroys unworthy ideals, and it represses the injustice of admirers, but it is a very uncertain guide to absolute truth, and it illustrates by its capricious activity the point on which I am insisting. It shows how transient may be a high earthly reputation. Scarcely any two writers who have discussed him during the last seventy years that have passed since his death have been agreed as to the merits or demerits of the first Napoleon; and if—to come nearer to our present subject—we recall the names of women who have figured on the scene of human history,—Hypatia, Semiramis, Zenobia, the Countess Matilda, Catherine of Medici, Elizabeth of England, Mary Stuart of Scotland, Maria Theresa of Austria, Catherine the Second of Russia—various have been the world's judgments about them. But of this vacillation in her own case, Mary has no apprehension whatever. Filled with the spirit of prophecy, she looks down the long procession of the ages, with their incessant vicissitudes of races and of opinions, and she is sure that her name will ever carry with it associations which must ensure for it an universal welcome. "From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

And is she not right? Nearly nineteen centuries have passed since she spoke, and who is there that knows anything, be he a believer or a man of average information, interested only in the concerns which affect our race, who has not heard of Mary? A man cannot help hearing of her, so conspicuously does she loom on the page of history. True enough it is that around the solid records respecting her in the Gospels, religious imagination has been unwontedly busy, and early in the history of Christendom there were documents still existing which the early Church rejected as apocryphal, in which her

birth and infancy, and the exceptional distinctions supposed to have been accorded to her after her birth, are elaborated with a license which might perhaps have been pardonable in poetry if only it had not been treated as prose. Into this vast subject it is not consistent with my present purpose to enter. Suffice it to say that, whatever the exaggerations and legends which have thus gathered around the name of Mary, they cannot obscure the greatness which is assigned to her in the pages of the Gospel, while they illustrate even in their wildest forms the place which she herself claimed to occupy, the place which she ever since has occupied in the minds of men. Compare Mary, from this point of view, with some of the great ladies who were nearly or exactly her contemporaries. While Mary was fetching water in a pitcher day by day from the well of Nazareth, or gathering fruit and wood on the hill above the village, the stately dames, surrounded by a crowd of slaves, swept proudly through the halls of the Cæsars. Their crimes or their misfortunes were the talk of the civilised world, but if we except here and there some professed student of history, what do men know about them to-day? What do you know about Livia, who parted from an honourable husband that she might be the wife of Augustus; or of Julia, the ill-used daughter of Augustus, and wife of Tiberius, or of Octavia, the sister of Augustus, whom Antony divorced that he might marry Cleopatra; or of Antonia, the high-minded daughter of Octavia, who lived, they say, only to be poisoned by her grandson Caligula; or of the empresses—better perhaps unmentioned in a Christian Church—who are associated with the courts of Claudius and of Nero? The names of these ladies were once as familiar to the population of the empire as are to ourselves the members of any royal family in Europe; but who, except a few students, knows anything whatever about them now? They filled for a few years the thoughts, they supplied materials for the gossip of the world, and now they are for all practical purposes utterly forgotten, while the lowly maiden who was living unknown in a remote province

of that vast empire which was ruled by their nearest relatives is at this hour more remembered by civilised men than any other member of her sex who ever lived.

But what is the justification of this astonishing confidence on the part of Mary that she will be remembered as blessed to the utmost limits of time. It is not anything that she has previously achieved. It is not any grace or excellence attaching to her mind or character. That she was personally endowed with graces of the highest excellence and beauty we may be well assured. In coming among us the Eternal Son would by His grace make ready a fitting temple prepared for Himself: but Mary dwells on nothing of this kind, nothing that is personal to herself. She only knows that she has been the recipient of a privilege conferred on her by the free bounty of her Creator. "He that is mighty hath done to me great things, and Holy is His name." She refers, of course, to what was implied by the message of the angel Gabriel at the annunciation: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women. Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God; thou shalt bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give Him the throne of His Father David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end;" and, in answer to Mary's expression of wonder, "the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Mary had received these assurances in submissive faith: "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word." And these assurances were the warrant of the confidence which she expresses, that "All generations shall call me blessed." How, indeed, could it be otherwise, if she was to be the mother of the heir of David's throne and promises, if He was to be born of her, and from the supernatural conditions of His birth to be recognised as the Son of God? Nothing

that she had done or could have done, nothing that she was or could have been, could have merited this extraordinary distinction. And Mary is bent upon ascribing it unreservedly to God: "He that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is His name."

Be careful to observe that Mary dwells not on her person, but on her office in the economy of the Incarnation. Not once in the *Magnificat* does she let fall one single word which points to a sense on her part of personal desert or excellence. Her joy is that "He that is mighty hath done good things to me, and," she adds, "holy is His name." She does not understand why she should have been singled out for such high honour, but she is sure that, since He wills it, all must be well, for "His name,"—which is to her apprehension inseparable from, since it unfolds, His nature—"His name is holy." Holiness is the rule and measure of that which ordains. Elizabeth had wondered: "Whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Mary does not repudiate the honour. To have done so would have been to make little of God's astonishing bounty, but she insists that, whatever she is, she is by the grace and bounty of God, and in this respect is on a level with all His creatures. And in this, brethren, is she not an example to an age like ours, which has—we may admit it—no very robust faith in the presence of the gifts of God, but does pay even exceptional homage to the merits or accomplishments of individual men? Even the modern Church of Christ has not wholly escaped the disposition to think less of a sacred office than of the man who happens to hold it, to dwell lightly on the gift or the commission which is received from Christ, and which is common to the holder with all his brethren, and to devote exceptional attention to anything that is strictly peculiar to the man, anything that can be supposed to be the product of the man's own character or industry. It may be that we of the clergy have not always been sufficiently on our guard against this fatal tendency to disparage the commission which Christ has given us in the interests of some fancied or real

endowments of our own. Any such mistake as this is tacitly rebuked by Mary in her *Magnificat*. She never leads us to think for a moment of what she personally is, but we do not for a moment forget that she is by office the mother of the Redeemer. Indeed, when we review the terms in which she refers to her surpassing privilege, it is impossible not to be struck with their guarded and reserved tone. "He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden; He that is mighty hath done to me great things."

We wonder, perhaps, that she is not more explicit, that, knowing what she must know of her extraordinary place in the order of Divine providence, she does not say more about it, does not, at least in outline, describe what it is. "He that is mighty hath done to me great things." "An ordinary Christian," we say to ourselves, "might say as much after recovering from a dangerous illness, or after a spiritual change which has altered profoundly all his views and purposes in life." Mary is to be the mother of the Eternal Son; she is to be, as the Christian poet of our time says with literal truth, "favoured beyond archangel's dream"; and yet she might seem to desire to draw a veil over her prerogatives by phrases which, while implying in her mouth something extraordinary, convey no definite idea of what it is. Can we venture in any way to account for this? It would seem, then, my brethren, that here Mary is teaching us a lesson which has never been unneeded since converse between the human soul and God has had a place in the life of man. She is teaching us the duty of speaking very sparingly, if we speak at all, of any blessings peculiar to ourselves which we may have reason to believe that God has conferred on us individually. This does not apply to the general truths of Christian experience. We can never be mistaken, when a good opportunity offers, in insisting on the power of prayer, or the value of the example of religious friends, or the instruction and encouragement to be gained from Holy Scripture, or the grace and the efficacy of the Christian sacraments. We can never be wrong in

insisting on these truths, which are the common inheritance of Christians. The reality of our Lord's love for us, His making atonement for us on the Cross, making intercession for us in the heights of heaven, the incalculable issues of every human life, the nearness, the reality of the eternal world—to say what we may with sincerity and with reverence on these high subjects is indeed to praise God in His holiness, to praise Him in the firmament of His power, and to praise Him in His noble acts, to praise Him according to His excellent greatness ; but when we come to matters which touch us, and us alone, to blessings which we only have received, to experiences which, so far as we know, have been shared by no others, the case is very different. As to these, the best rule is to say nothing at all about them if we can help it, or, if we must say something, to say as little as possible. That God does at times visit one particular soul as He visits no others can hardly be doubted. The Bible teaches us that He does visit us in a variety of ways, and Christian experience has always been in accord with this teaching of Scripture. These favours or gifts to individuals are very numerous. They are suited to the needs or the temperaments of those who receive them. They cannot be catalogued, they cannot be reduced to a system. Sometimes God gives to a soul a peculiar satisfaction and joy in prayer ; sometimes a vivid sense of His presence in times of anxiety or trouble ; sometimes a keen and clear presentiment of blessedness of the world to come. There is no question here of communications made, whether in prayer or otherwise, to a single soul for the sake of others, as when, during that stormy night in the Mediterranean, the Lord stood by His servant Paul, and assured him of the safety of himself and his fellow-voyagers, but which may pass between God and the soul ; which has no reference to others whatever, as when God encouraged St. Paul in the vision at Corinth, or strengthened him during the second imprisonment at Rome. Such things may take place to-day in any Christian life. There is no reason for doubting the reality of such special favours, but

there is great reason why those who have received, or think they have received, them should say as little about them as they may. For, first, there is always the possibility that what looks like a spiritual visit, endowment or grace—especially if it be of an unusual character—may be in truth some illusion or purely natural emotion. That such illusions do exist is no less certain than is the existence of the spiritual graces or gifts which they counterfeit. And next, supposing there to be no element of illusion at all, a soul cannot but suffer if, like the pagan king, Merodach Baladan, it displays its treasures in ostentatious temper—and the danger of ostentation is a very subtle one—and may exist when it is least suspected. And then, thirdly, there is the ever-present risk of exaggeration, not in the coarse form of representing that as occurring which as a matter of fact never did occur at all, but in the more common forms of giving distinctness and outline to something which was really very indefinite character, and what was colourless, vividness, and point where these elements of interest were really wanting. Probably we have all heard of meetings of earnest people in which first one and then another member of the company has retailed his experiences. If these experiences were strictly confined to sins, such meetings might be very improving. In the early Church of Christ Christians confessed their sins in public, and such confession, it need hardly be said, was a very good lesson in the difficult work of learning to be really humble and really sincere. But to talk in public of any tokens of God's special favours towards us, or, still more, about our good points, even if our estimate of them is an accurate one, is surely very dangerous—dangerous to those graces of truthfulness and self-forgetfulness which are in the Christian life of almost more account than anything else.

I do not say that no occasion can ever arise to justify departure from this rule. One such occasion we know did present itself in the time of St. Paul. He had been traduced by his opponents at Corinth as an ambitious, scheming, and,

above all, an unspiritual man who was really working against Christ's older Apostles, Peter and James, and who acted as he did because, unlike them, he knew that he had never witnessed such sights as the Transfiguration, as the vision of Christ in glory. If his own reputation or comfort had only been at stake, the Apostle would have been silent, but, if his opponents were to be unanswered, his whole work for Jesus Christ at Corinth would be imperilled, and therefore very reluctantly he partially—only partially—withdraws the veil from an occurrence of which but for the ice-natured gossips of the Corinthian sectarians, we should never have heard. In doing this he only half admits that he is the subject of his own narrative. He refers to the receiver of the singular distinction which he records as if he were or might be some one other than himself. "I knew a man in Christ fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth); such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man (whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth); how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory, yet of myself I cannot glory, but in mine infirmities." We see how a reference to this striking passage in his life was wrung out of the soul of the unwilling Apostle by the sheer pressure of a spiritual necessity, and something of the same kind must have been the case with the blessed Virgin, when for the honour of her Son and to promote the true and full knowledge of his eternal Gospel, she communicated, as she must have communicated to the Evangelist St. Luke, the exact details of what passed between herself and the angel at the Annunciation. While acknowledging Elizabeth's congratulations she is under no such pressing necessity, and therefore quite deliberately she veils what has happened under more general terms in the *Magnificat* which I have just been alluding to. It is a point of spiritual wisdom to know how

to say enough—to give God His due—and yet not so much as to feed the subtle self-approbation which is one of the worst foes of the true well-being of man.

Mary concludes the second strophe of her hymn by lines which lead our thoughts away from God's dealings with herself to a general law of His providence: "His mercy is on them that fear Him, throughout all generations." And yet in these words she may be well classing herself among those who fear God, and whom God in consequence visits with His mercy, whatever form the visitation may take. By fear she means that sincere and awe-struck apprehension of the presence and majesty of God, who is the beginning of all spiritual wisdom, since without it the soul can take no true measure either of itself or of what is due to the Author and the end of its existence. Such fear may come to co-exist with love, although love in such a degree, as it becomes perfect, expels from fear the element of terror, while preserving that of reverent and watchful apprehension. It is in this sense that "perfect love casteth out fear." Fear and love are two guardians of the higher life of the human soul, and God never fails to help and govern those whom He brings up in His steadfast fear and love. Mary then shows, by what took place at the Annunciation, that she had this fear or reverent apprehension of God deep in her heart, that she was looking out for the intimations of His will, and that, as a consequence, His mercy lightened upon her in making her the mother of His Son. But the same law of His action would hold good for all coming time; not by natural works of righteousness which man had done, but according to His merit, would Jesus Christ our Lord save men from their sins; and this merit would be accorded to those who had in their hearts, to start with, that sensitiveness to what was amiss in them which some apprehension of what God is alone can give. So it was with those earliest believers who waited for the consolation of Israel, so it has been with every soul which has come in adult life out of that darkness of heathenism

or the darkness of unbelief to a knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. To the end of time He is the channel and dispenser to the human race of the infinite mercy of God, and He dispenses it to those, and to those only, who begin with fear.

But Mary's words have another and deeper meaning: it is, that for the endless well-being of the soul the earliest stirrings of life which are due to a Divine influence and which are called respectively fear and love are more important even than any religious privileges. They are more important, not in themselves, but to us, because without them the greatest religious privileges are like seed that is dropped into the desert sand, they cannot bear fruit, they cannot do anything really for us. We may dare to say that even to Mary it was more important that she should have the fear of God in her heart than that she should be the mother of the Incarnate Son, since our Lord Himself has told us so. You remember that striking scene in after years, when one of a crowd of eager listeners around Him, in a transport of enthusiasm, essayed to win His heart by reference to the blessedness of His mother—"Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the breasts which Thou hast sucked." And what is His answer? He does not discourage, much less does He deny, the high standing and privilege of His mother Mary, but He insists that, both for her and for all others, the more important thing is the temper of obedient fear which alone makes any religious privilege other than dangerous. "Yea, rather, blessed are they which hear the Word of God and keep it." He does not here imply that His mother did not satisfy this condition of true blessedness. We are told, indeed, that she kept in view all God's providential dealings towards her, and that she "pondered them in her heart," but He would direct attention away from religious privilege, however eminent, to those vital convictions without which no spiritual privilege can be turned to any account whatever. We can never afford to lose sight of this truth. The human mind has constantly attempted to think that the possession of high religious office, or of special

religious opportunity, is of itself a warrant of security—of religious security—in time and for eternity; and nothing is less true. A man may be an apostle, and yet a Judas; he may be the companion of apostles, and yet a Demas; he may be the receiver of the greatest of all blessings beneath the throne of God—the sacrament of Christ's body and blood, yet he may eat and drink to his own condemnation. What is of vital importance is not warm or excited feelings—these are often enough full of illusion—but that sensitiveness of conscience to the will and presence of God which the Bible calls "fear." "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord: he hath great delight in His commandments." "Blessed are all they that fear the Lord and walk in His ways, for thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands; O well is thee, and happy shalt thou be!"

And thus, even in the presence of the greatest religious distinction that ever was enforced on a human being, we are led to reflect that, after all, religion is the greatest equalising force in this human world. We know how great are the inequalities between human lives, and they are due to causes which are rooted in the nature of things, and which are always appearing, so that, if they could be suppressed by legal enactment to-morrow, they would reappear in a week's time. The rich and the poor, the powerful and the defenceless, the honoured and neglected, will be found in human society to the end of time, for the simple reason that men enter life with very different equipments of natural powers, and this difference will certainly express itself in consequences beyond. But men of large and warm hearts who have dwelt constantly, and even bitterly, on the social and other inequalities of life, have sought to find redress for these in nature or in books. "Whatever be our position in life," they say, "we are all equally free to enjoy a writer like Shakespeare, and, as we read him, we are all, monarchs or working-men, on a level before his genius and his insight. Whatever be our position in life, we are all equally free to enjoy nature. The outline of the great mountain, the first burst of spring, the glories of the autumnal

sunset, and the beauties of heaven on a clear night—these are common property.” Yes, to an extent this is true, but to enjoy the masterpieces of literature, at least, a certain education is needed; and those who would enjoy nature are not always free enough or wealthy enough to seek her where she may be seen to the best advantage. It is otherwise with those elementary and closely-related movements of the human soul on which God sheds His mercy, and which are the first steps, as they are the crowning accomplishments, of a truly religious life. Every single human heart may fear, may love, the God who made it. Religious instruction and religious opportunities are indeed precious, and where they are within reach, fear and love will conspire to make the very most of them, since assuredly they cannot be neglected without peril; but, where they are not to be had, if there is the fear of God in the heart, there most assuredly is His mercy too; and where there is the love of the perfect moral Being, there is also within reach a presence in the soul which may even compare with that which was vouchsafed to Mary. “If any man love Me, He will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with Him.” Only one woman could be the mother of the Most Holy when He vouchsafed to enter our human world, but there is no reason why each and all of us should not know by intimate experience what the Apostle means by that astonishing, yet most blessed saying, “Christ in you the hope of glory.”

III. THE THIRD STROPHE.*

“He hath showed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down princes from their throne, and hath exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away.”—LUKE i. 51-53.

BETWEEN the second strophe of the *Magnificat*, which we were

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, August 18th, being the Ninth Sunday after Trinity, 1889.

considering a week ago, and the third, which is before us to-day, there is a contrast which makes the transition from one to the other appear somewhat abrupt. In the second strophe, so far as her humility and self-repression would permit, Mary was speaking of herself. She foretold her place throughout all time in the memories and the hearts of men. She touched upon the great things which God had done unto her. She was not excluding reference to herself, even when she sang of that mercy of God which unto all generations is on them that fear Him. But, in the strophe which is before us to-day, she is surveying the wide field of human history, she sees God's arm of power displayed in it, she notes the changes which God makes in the fortunes of nations and of dynasties, and His rule of action in the kingdom of grace: "He hath showed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down princes from their thrones, He hath exalted them of low degree. He hath fed the hungry with good things, the rich He hath sent empty away." Now, what is the connection between that more personal history and this larger survey of the connection of God in the civil and religious affairs of man? How does Mary come to have passed so rapidly from one to the other?

Reflect here, my brethren, on a common experience of the human mind in all ages, whether in the sphere of inspiration or beyond it. At times of deeply-moved feeling, whether of joy or sorrow, the soul of man is raised above the level of its average existence, and enjoys the command of a larger outlook. The pettier cares of life are lost sight of in these moments of unwonted elevation; and wide and extended horizons, which are ordinarily beyond the range of sight, come clearly into view. From the crest of the wave that is bearing him towards some unknown shore, the mariner looks out for an instant on a distant prospect, it may be of a precipitous cliff, it may be of hills and valleys and peaceful homesteads, and all that recalls the security of a landsman's life, though as he gazes he

sinks forthwith into the trough of the sea ; and the human soul too is able, when borne upward by a wave of feeling, to perceive larger fields of truth than usual, even though the vision should pass almost as soon as it has been enjoyed. Something of this kind has often been observed at the approach of death. Men who are not generally given to hazard predictions, or even enunciate general principles, will sometimes speak from a death-bed as though they were invested with a kind of prophetic character, so large seems their range of view, so clear, so confident their opinions as to what will or will not take place in certain departments of life after they are gone. And a great joy will sometimes have a like result, and we have observed how recovery from the extremity of illness, or the birth of a son, or an unlooked-for deliverance from impending ruin, will lead even ordinarily taciturn people to speculate aloud on the influences which govern human life, and with which they feel themselves for the moment to be in vivid contact. Mary's inspiration would not have withdrawn her from the operation of this law of the particular kind of illumination which is attendant on certain states of elevated feeling. Her own experience would lead her to reflect on God's general principles of government, for the principles on which God deals with single souls are the same principles as those which control His dealings with nations and races and churches. The difference lies in the scale of their application. When Isaac Newton saw an apple fall from a tree, and had asked himself the question, why it did not go upwards instead of downwards, he had discovered the great law which governs the movements of the heavenly bodies ; and when Mary surveyed her own history clearly she recognised the universal principles of God's government of the world. She was a descendant of David's line, and she knew how in the past her ancestors had been put down from their thrones, while she in her low estate had been recently exalted to a far higher honour than can be conferred by an earthly crown. Like every true Israelite, she had longed to see God's often promised salvation, and

lo! she herself was to be the mother of the promised One.

Such experiences could not but lead her to consider the general truths which they so strikingly illustrated, but before she announced them she pauses to do homage to a fact which takes precedence even of these truths, and which throws them out into their full relief. That fact is the active, the never-failing providence of Him who keepeth all things both in heaven and in earth. No fact is perhaps so widely confessed, and, practically, so forgotten, as God's action on the affairs of the world and of men's separate lives. Yet for those who believe in God this fact may always be verified, since it explains, and it alone explains, much which takes place, while, if much also takes place which to our apprehensions it does not explain, we may reflect that, alike in what He does and in what He permits, God, as the Infinite Being, naturally does and allows much which we cannot understand. But Mary sings, "He hath showed strength with His arm." The human arm represents man's working power. The arm executes the orders of the will, and it is in the vigorous, quickly moving arm that we recognise a will of energy and decision. Thus, in the language of the Hebrews, the word "arm" was used generally in the sense of power, as when the man of God prophesied to Eli the downfall of his family, "Behold, the days come that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house;" or, when Jeremiah exclaims, "The arm of Moab is broken;" or, when Ezekiel, speaking in the name of God, says, "I have broken the arm of Pharaoh, king of Egypt." A word thus used to denote human power was naturally transferred to Divine, without, of course, implying in the Divine Being, in the ages before the Incarnation, any likeness to the human form. Thus again and again God is said to deliver His people from Egypt, and from later oppressors, with "an outstretched arm," that is by a special exertion of His power; and a psalmist sings how that God "with His own right hand and His holy arm has gotten

Himself the victory ;” and another psalmist that “He hath scattered His name abroad with His mighty arm.” Isaiah speaks of God judging the people with His arm, and He predicts that the arm of the Lord shall be on the Chaldeans, and he invokes the Divine attribute of power in favour of Israel : “Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O arm of the Lord,” and He asks, with reference to the Redeemer, considered as embodying and exhibiting the power of God, “To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ?” These, as all readers of their Bibles would know, are only a few of the passages which might be quoted ; so that Mary was using old and Scripture language when she described God’s power by the metaphor of an arm.

And what does she mean by suggesting that God had showed strength with His arm ? Clearly that His incessant energy had brought about particular results which were calculated to impress the minds of men with a sense of His power as vividly as though they had seen the heavens open, and an arm of irresistible might stretched out to shape the course of men and events according to the good pleasure of the invisible Being whose arm it was. Let us observe that one of the principal uses of the historical books of the Old Testament is to accustom us to look at all human history in this way, to see God’s hand and arm in it, to trace in it the strong action of His holy will. He is not less present in English than in Jewish history, nor has He less concern with our separate lives than with those of the forefathers and heroes and saints of Israel. The great difference is that, as a rule, we do not see Him as they did. Mary, at any rate, before she goes further will not leave the matter in doubt ; “God,” she says, “hath showed strength with His arm.”

She passes on to note one particular series of events moving through long periods of history in which this action of the arm of God is especially manifested. “He hath scattered the insolently proud in”—or by—“the imagination of their hearts ; He hath put down princes from their thrones, He hath exalted

them of low degree." Mary here, it seems, looks backward and forward; she is at once historian and prophetess. She is proclaiming principles of the Divine government, which will be as true in the remote future as they have been true in the distant past. She looks backward over the ages of history, and she beholds kingdoms which have fallen from great prosperity into utter ruin, and princes whose names were once the terror of the world, and whose thrones have long since been vacant, or have been humbled to the dust. "He hath scattered the proud"—or literally—"the insolently proud." The word which she uses accurately describes the prevailing temper of the average occupant of an Eastern throne. It is the temper which is naturally produced by long-continued success, by the accumulation of much wealth and much power. We see it on a small scale in men among ourselves in private life, who have had everything their own way, who have made money rapidly, who have achieved social, perhaps political, importance, who, above all, have had many years of unbroken health. To prosper in this way, and to remain humble, self-distrustful, unselfish, mindful of the real conditions of life, mindful of the nearness of death, and the weakness of the very strongest man, and of the awful Presence and Power which is around and which is above us,—this is the exception rather than the rule. The rule is that when men in such a position are not under the direct influence of religion, they become haughty and self-asserting, even when they have sufficient good taste, as distinct from religious principle, to check the exuberant exhibition of these tendencies in what they do and say. But if this is the case on a small scale in Christendom, and in private life, think what must happen when a man is in the position of one of the ancient kings of Egypt or Assyria, with unchecked power over the lives and fortunes of his subjects, with vast wealth, large armies, a great company of accomplished slaves, altogether at his disposal. Wonderful indeed it would be if, without the control of true

religion, the heart of a man in such a position did not swell with an intolerable pride; wonderful if he did not altogether lose sight of the real measure of things and the place of every mortal man in the universe of God, of his true relations with God and with his brother man. Mary knows all this, and thus she sings of God scattering the insolently proud in, or rather by, the imagination of their hearts. The false estimate of self, of men and things, which is engendered by the temper in question, is constantly fatal to the very position which has appeared to warrant it. It overrates, does that temper, it overrates its own resources, it underrates the resources of others; it overrates material wealth or power, it underrates the strength of those moral convictions which lie deep in the hearts of millions of men; it is so inflated by the successes of the past that it cannot coldly take account of the contingencies of the future; it is so full of its Vienna and of its Austerlitz that it cannot anticipate what may happen amid the snows of Russia, or during a retreat from Moscow. It is not a particularity of the ancient, as also it is not a particularity of the modern world; it is not less true in public life than in private life, that God scatters to the winds the insolence which is too full of self to recognise the conditions with which any position whatever is held in this world by any man or any nation at all. Mary, no doubt, would often have heard her parents talk over the story of the fall of those ancestors of hers, and theirs who last sat in Jerusalem on the throne of David,—such men as Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, how far the temper and the conduct of their predecessors and their own had helped to bring it all about, and the solemn truths which inspired those warnings of Jeremiah, which, to the last kings of Judah and to their courtiers, seemed to be so disloyal, so unpatriotic. But if these monarchs of what was only an inconsiderable state had to learn that they would not reign because they closed themselves in cedar, their fall was, in the outward scale of nations, as nothing compared with that of the occupants of the mighty thrones all around them. The Egyptian hieroglyphics

and the cuneiform characters have yielded up their secrets to the industry of modern scholars, and we have to-day before our eyes proud inscriptions in which the old kings of Egypt and Assyria announced their will or proclaimed their triumphs to their subjects or to the world. Nothing is more remarkable in these inscriptions than the astonishing self-assertion which inspires them; from first to last they are the language of men who sincerely believe that there are no bounds to their power, and that to traverse their will is an unpardonable crime. The Egyptian kings held quite seriously that they were deities in human form, and they spoke and acted accordingly. The Bible bears out this witness of the inscriptions to the tempers of the ancient monarchies. Ezekiel records the saying of a contemporary Pharaoh about the Nile: "My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself." Daniel tells us that Nebuchadnezzar walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon, and the king spake and said: "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power and for the honour of my majesty?" And how does Ezekiel address a much less considerable potentate than these, the Prince of Tyre? "Thine heart is lifted up, thou hast said: I am a god, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas." And in a later age there was a scene at Cæsarea which illustrates the point before us, when Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne and made an oration to the embassies from Tyre and Sidon, and the people, unchecked it would seem, gave a shout, saying: "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." Mary knew what had happened to Egypt, she knew what had been the fate of Tyre and of Babylon; before her eyes there passed a long procession of vacant and ruined thrones. Assyria had gone down before Babylon, Babylon and Egypt had gone down before the Persians, the Persians in their turn before the great Alexander, Alexander's generals in Egypt and in Syria had set up monarchies which by turns oppressed Israel in the later stages of its history. Never did a country go through a

more exhausting struggle for its very life than did the Jews under the Maccabees, but those oppressors, too, had lately gone their way. Egypt and Syria had alike been humbled—utterly humbled—before the Roman power; and it might be said that when Mary sang the East was still echoing to the crash of falling thrones; and one power remained supreme on earth—at least to the apprehension of populations that had never heard of the events then going on in India and in China—one power remained, the power of imperial Rome. But Mary is a prophetess, not less than an historian, and as she could foretell her own place in the memory of the grateful Church, so she could divine, though afar off, what would happen to the great world-empire.

True, she speaks of what God *has* done: “He hath scattered,” “He hath put down,” “He hath exalted,” “He hath filled,” “He hath sent away”; but this is sometimes the style of a prophet who is by no means bound to use a future tense when he is foretelling a future time. The vision of the future passes before the prophet’s soul, and he describes what he sees as actually occurring, or as already accomplished; and thus it is that Isaiah, more especially in the latter part of his book, foretells the captivity in Babylon as if it were a state of things in the midst of which he himself was actually living. And the prophets sometimes used a past tense quite advisedly as expressing as vividly as possible their conviction that the predicted future is quite as certain as the past. When then Mary speaks of His putting down princes from their thrones she may well mean Roman emperors in the future, no less than the dynasties which had long since ceased to rule on the Nile and on the Euphrates. When Mary sang, Rome was at the height of her power, the greatest part of the world—of the known world—obeyed her lays, her legions had planted her eagles on the Rhine, on the Danube, on the Euphrates, on the Nile, on the sands of Africa, and her civilisation, with its blessings and its vices, her institutions, her manners and customs, even her language, had followed them. The world

was already Roman, not only in name, but, to a large extent, in sympathy and purpose, and no social and political fabric that had ever bound civilised men together seemed to be so strong or so durable as that which stood around the throne of the Cæsars. And yet the causes which had brought about the downfall of her power were at work within the great empire. Material splendour had blinded men's eyes to the secret symptoms of decay, to the natural principles and virtues which alone could avert it, and at last the crash came. It nearly came in the third century after Christ, two hundred years before its time : it came with overwhelming terrors in the fifth century when Goths and Huns and Vandals and Lombards swept like a wave of angry men over the wreck of the old civilisation, and at last were the words which St. John had heard in vision fulfilled, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen !"

But the work of the arm of the Lord, as Mary watches it from afar, is not merely or chiefly destructive ;—it scatters and destroys only that it may gather and rebuild. As the Church says, with such truth and beauty : "God declareth His almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity." When Mary sings that God "had exalted the humble and meek," or rather "them of low estate"; she may well be thinking of the people of Israel among the nations of the world, surrounded by mighty monarchies, while itself occupying a territory not very much larger than a large English county, and yet designed to be the people of revelation, and to exercise an altogether unrivalled influence on the future of the human race. Or she may have in her mind such careers as those of Joseph in one age at the court of Egypt, or of Daniel and Esther in another at the courts of Babylon and Persia. But she cannot but also have reflected on the high honour put upon herself. What royal distinctions were in reality even comparable to her who was the chosen mother of Emmanuel, her of whom, as St. Paul said of her race, "as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever" ?

And may we not here also observe that what she says has a reference to the future as well as to the past? Does she not also describe a far-off time, when the disciples of the Crucified would succeed to the empire of the world, when the meek would inherit the earth, and would be refreshed in the multitude of peace? The triumph of Christianity, notwithstanding the faults of individual Christians, or of politicians like Constantine, who brought it about, was on the whole a victory of purity and patience, of humility and conscientiousness, over the corruption, the violence, the pride, the lack of moral principles, which had so characterised the social fabric of the old empire; and Mary saw it coming; she saw it coming from afar; she saw that it was involved in the angel's promise respecting her Son: "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end." How far happier would men be if they could only be sure that their future place in another life, if not in this, will be the reverse, I do not say of their place, but of their temper, whether of self-effacement or of self-assertion, in this. Doubtless there have been paupers who have cherished in their rags the pride of discontent in a measure not unworthy of Sennacherib, and there have been kings whom coronet and sceptre and the fascinations of power and the adulations of a court have not rendered incapable of cultivating the humble and patient temper of a Christian saint. The position counts for much less than the temper. As it is the self-asserting temper which God deposes from its throne of pride, so it is the self-renouncing temper which He exalts to His realm of glory. How could it be otherwise when He Himself, being in the form of God, and not deeming His equality with God a prize to be eagerly grasped, emptied Himself of His glory and took on Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man—and why? In order that this same mind might be in us which was also in Himself, Christ Jesus. And what wonder is it that the mother of the Incarnate God should proclaim a moral truth which is the very first lesson of the Divine Incarnation?

And corresponding with this law of the depression of the insolent, and the exaltation of the unpretending, is God's rule of administration in the spiritual world. They who are sensible of their needs and deficiencies, they who are seeking truth, and longing for Christ, are, sooner or later, satisfied. They who deem themselves to have no need of anything from on high, who are sure that they see at once to the bottom of every question, who hold that they can do right without any aid whatever from the Author of all good, the self-reliant and the self-complacent—these men are excluded from all share in the Divine bounty. "He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away." This principle that a sense and confession of want must precede in intelligent men any communication of God's best blessings is in keeping, as Mary's metaphor suggests, with the law of nature. If food is to invigorate the human body, if it is not to be an incumbrance and a cause of discomfort and disease, it must be welcomed by appetite. Appetite is nature's own certificate that food will not be injurious; and if a soul is to be benefited by truth or grace that soul must desire it. Nothing is more constantly taught us in Holy Scripture than this; and from this fact there follows another, namely—that God withholds these blessings when men do not seek them. This is the constant teaching of the Old Testament. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it;" "Call upon me," says God, by the mouth of Jeremiah to Israel; "Call upon Me, and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things that thou knowest not of." "If," says Solomon, "thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding, if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." So a psalmist during the exile sings: "Blessed are they that keep God's testimonies, and seek Him with their whole heart. . . . I have had as great delight in the way of Thy testimonies as in all manner of riches. . . . Open Thou mine eyes that I may see wondrous things out of

Thy law. . . . My soul hath longed for Thy salvation, and I have a good hope because of Thy word. Mine eyes long sore for Thy word, saying: O when wilt Thou comfort me." This teaching and these passages would have been familiar to Mary from her earliest years, and her Son and Lord confirmed their import in after years: "Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." On the other hand Mary proclaims that the rich God hath sent empty away. God does not force Himself on those who think that they can do without Him. He offers them His good things, and, if He meets with the indifference of an imaginary sufficiency, He passes on. They who deem themselves too well off to need Him are taken at their word. They cannot complain if it is so. So it was in the days of our Lord and His Apostles. Herod, Pilate, Felix, all came quite close to truth: all were sent empty away, while Simeon and Hannah, and first one and then another Apostle, the fisherman, the tax-gatherer, the tent-maker, Cornelius the centurion,—these were filled with the good things of faith in the unseen and hope in the imperishable inheritance of love towards God and man.

And as with individuals so with classes of men. The average Greek, satisfied with his shallow pride of culture, had no eye for the realities of the moral world or for his own deep need of pardon and of grace. He toyed with some one of the current philosophies, and if it told him nothing certainly about those things which it the most concerns a thinking man to know, it at least produced in him a tranquil sense of satisfaction with his own power, that self-complacent life of the average Jew. He was either a hard-hearted sceptic like the Sadducees, or he was a man of phrasings and forms only like the Pharisee, who is apostrophised by St. Paul: "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest His will, and approvest the things that are more

excellent, being instructed out of the law, and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law."

This is a picture of the temper of a great number of men in the Apostolic time, and we can understand how in such a state of mind, "they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, went about to establish their own righteousness, not submitting themselves to the righteousness of God." The earlier chapters of the Epistle to the Romans are devoted to breaking down, in Gentile and Jew alike, this fatal temper of satisfaction with self, and to proving that, since all the world is certainly guilty before an All-holy God, all need the gift of pardon and of peace which is offered by His blessed Son incarnate and crucified for men.

And this consideration may enable us, in conclusion, to answer two questions which are very often asked nowadays, and which are very practical indeed in their bearings. The first is: Why do so many people who have opportunities of knowing Christian truth, and have good natural abilities and education, often know so little about its real character? The answer, at least in a great many cases, is that they do not make a serious effort to find out what it is. They take it for granted that, while they cannot master a science or learn a new language without taking serious trouble, religious truth will come to them somehow as a matter of course. They have heard something about it many years ago, and that, they think, will probably do. They give the real energy, the real vigour, of their minds to the things of this world: they give a few spare moments to religion. "Religion," they say to themselves by way of excuse, "being meant for all, can easily be explained with a very little trouble by any person of average ability, and to spend too much trouble on it would be a waste of time." Now natural ability has nothing necessarily to do with a real apprehension of religious truth.

Natural ability can master the surroundings of religion, the evidences on which the creed depends, the historical circumstances which accompanied the appearance of our Lord among men, the outline and history of the Christian Church, the controversies which have arisen on religious matters from century to century, but the essential point, the appeal which our Lord and Saviour makes to the moral and spiritual faculty in every man, has no more to do with his intellectual capacity than it has with his accomplishments as an athlete or an artist; and, unless the spiritual faculty is on the alert, hungering to be satisfied with the good things of God, religious truth falls dead upon the soul, whatever a man's natural abilities may be. It is one thing to read about religion, to use religious language,—a good thing, I admit, as far as it goes,—but it is another to perceive its reality from its perfect adaptation to the wants and the aspirations of our own single souls. And this perception is impossible if we allow ourselves to think that, as we know all about it, there is no need for further trouble. However much he may have learned about God, a true Christian is always learning, and he knows that, since he, a finite being, is face to face with the Infinite, there must always be something, or rather much, to learn. He is always forgetting those things that are behind, and reaching forward to those that are before. The moment he ceases to do this, ceases to desire to know more of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ, the pores of the soul forthwith close up, and a process of spiritual atrophy begins to develop itself. To him, as well as to souls that are choked with the riches and pleasures of this life, is addressed the solemn warning: "Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear, and to anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see."

And the other question : Why do so many of us apparently get so little moral and spiritual strength from receiving the Holy Communion ? Considering what that Sacrament really is, and who it is that we meet in it, and the purpose with which He comes to us, we may wonder that it is in so many cases to all appearance so unfruitful in spiritual results. Well, my brethren, there may be some other answers to a most important question, but one answer doubtless is that we do not sufficiently long for it. Our Lord Himself said of the last Passover at which He met His disciples, " With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer," and every communicant ought to be able to say quite sincerely to our Lord before each communion, " With desire have I desired to receive this Thy sacrament once more before I die." Such desire must grow out of, and be prompted by, an unaffected sense of our weakness—nay, of our utter impotence, without the strengthening presence and aid of Jesus Christ our Lord. But to a soul that has any true relish for spiritual things this desire is not less spontaneous than is the craving for food in a hungry mind. Such desire prompts and guides preparation for communion, review of conscience, confession of sins, prayers for the dispositions for repentance, faith and love, which befit the approach to the great means of grace. This spirit is that of the old psalmist in exile on the hills of Bashan, who, as his thoughts wandered to the services in the distant Temple, beheld, it would seem, at his feet, the wild gazelles tracking the water-courses that followed the mountain side in search of a spring that might slake their thirst : " Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God. When shall I come to appear before the presence of God ? "

May our Lord Jesus Christ of His great mercy empty us of all self, of all which makes us so satisfied with ourselves as to make us inaccessible to His supreme attractions. May He fill us with such love towards Himself that we, loving Him

above all things, may both here and hereafter obtain those promises which exceed all that we can desire.

IV. THE FOURTH STROPHE.*

“He hath holpen His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy, as He spake unto our forefathers, towards Abraham and his seed for ever.”—LUKE i. 54, 55.

TO-DAY we reach the closing strophe of Mary’s hymn, and it is obvious to remark how naturally as the utterance of a religious mind this strophe follows all that goes before it. Mary has told us how all the powers of her soul and spirit were engaged in praising God for the great and distinguished honour which had been vouchsafed to her. She has described this distinction so far as she might in itself and some of its consequences; she has hinted at the connection between it and the great rules by which God governs the world at large and the kingdom of souls; and now she would follow the gracious mystery thus confided to her up to its source in the life of God, and she finds it in His attributes of mercy and faithfulness. “He hath holpen His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy, as he promised to our fathers, His mercy towards Abraham and his seed for ever.”

“He hath holpen His servant Israel.” Mary, of course, under cover of this general statement, is referring to the Incarnation of the Son of God, whose mother she was to be. The terms which she uses are vague and distant as in some earlier verses of her hymn. “He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.” “He that is mighty hath done great things unto me.” When we consider what the coming of the Eternal Son of God clothed in our human nature into this our world really meant for all race, for all times, it seems little enough to say that by such an event God had brought help to

* Preached in St. Paul’s Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, August 25th.

Israel. But in fact Mary's apparent vagueness and reserve is not without a purpose. In the earlier lines of her hymn, as we have seen, it may be explained by the instinct of a sanctified character when touching upon subjects that intimately affected personal standing before God. In the last strophe it is dictated by her immediate purpose, which is to find the source of the Incarnation in God's loving-kindness, in God's truth. This could best be done by pointing to His past relations with Israel, since the birth of His Only Begotten Son of a Jewish mother was the fitting complement and crown of those relations. "He, remembering His mercy towards Abraham and his seed for ever, hath holpen His servant Israel." The Incarnation of our Lord again is ascribed by Mary first of all to God's remembrance of His mercy to Abraham and his descendants. The words, I may observe, "towards Abraham and his seed for ever" are certainly connected in the original with the words "for a remembrance of His mercy," although the line "as He spake to our forefathers" is parenthetically inserted between the two halves of the clause.

It was not, as in other places, God's mercy over all His works or over all the race of mankind, but His mercy towards Abraham and certain of his descendants that God is here said to have remembered. Why He should have selected this particular race of men to be the subjects of His special favours, to be constantly visited by His envoys, to be the guardians of His revelation and of His will, to be thus chosen out of all nations for a post of exceptional honour, is a subject on which we may speculate but can arrive at no certain knowledge. We can only say with the Apostle that "He has mercy on whom He will have mercy." The unequal distribution of gifts and privileges among His creatures by the Creator is unintelligible to that passion for an absolute equality which is a conspicuous ingredient of the social or political temper of our day. But whatever we may think about it, there it is, written on the very face of the works of God. If without detriment to His attributes of

justice and of love, God could create the various orders of living beings which we see around, and which differ so surprisingly in the qualities which help them to maintain and to protect life; if as human beings come into the world they find themselves equipped by the Creator, some with the highest gifts of genius and some with so low an order of intelligence as scarcely to deserve the name; if even the moral as well as the mental and physical advantages of men are so various as they are, then God's choice of Israel is at least in harmony with the general rules of His administration, and it is governed by considerations and by motives which, as lying behind Creation itself, are beyond the reach of human criticism. "He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy," and if we are satisfied that His decisions are of a perfectly holy will, we bow our heads and we are silent. The family of Abraham was God's choice, and in this choice there lay the earnest of blessings that were yet to come, for the calling as well as the gifts of God are without repentance. They are, as befits the majesty and generosity of the donor, irrevocable. They may take different forms from age to age, as the temper and disposition of men may require, but God's mercy towards Abraham and his seed for ever was as much a part of His will as the existence of any separate order of rational and irrational life, and Mary sees a signal proof of it in the fact that the Son of God was to be born of a Jewish mother. "He, remembering His mercy towards Abraham and his seed for ever, hath holpen His servant Israel."

But, further, Israel in the Divine mind, as is plain from the terms of the promises to the patriarchs, had also a wider meaning than the race or men who were lineally descended from them, and whom the Apostle calls "Israel after the flesh." Mary, indeed, had already sung of God's mercy as being "on them that fear Him throughout all generations," and this probably does not in fact mean anything different from God's mercy "towards Abraham and his seed for ever" in its wider sense. For who are the real seed, the true descendants of

Abraham? Not only they, as St. Paul has told us, who could claim descent from the Patriarch by blood, although such were so far from being excluded from a higher relationship with Abraham than the merely physical one that they had a first claim to it; but the Apostle insists that Abraham's seed includes millions who had no blood relationship with him; that the promise that in his seed all nations of the earth should be blessed imposed upon the idea of descent in Abraham's case a much wider and more spiritual meaning; that the children of this promise, those who by faith in Jesus Christ make this promise their own, were counted for a seed, were reckoned among Abraham's descendants, though they belonged to races utterly distinct from the stock of the patriarch.

Now this is not so strange an idea as it would appear at first sight, if we will reflect that there are two ways in which a man may be said to live in this world after he has left it—by the transmission of his blood, and by the transmission of his convictions, of his ideas, of his character. They are by no means incompatible forms of survival. God forbid! But they are, at least, very distinct from each other.

Jonadab, the son of Rechab, who was associated with King Jehu at a critical period of his career, is an instance of a man who combines the two characters in a remarkable degree. He was the spiritual as well as the natural ancestor of his descendants, the Rechabites. He lived on from age to age, not merely in their strong Bedouin frames, but in their method of life as wandering men who dwelt in tents, and were bound to him by certain ascetic observances; and long after he was gone, as we know from Jeremiah, when they were forced by the Chaldean invasion to take refuge within the walls of Jerusalem, they could not be induced to transgress, in any particular, the rules of their ancestor. A man may be the parent of an enormous family without transmitting to it anything whatever beyond the gift of physical life; and a man may be childless and yet may live after his death in the convictions of thousands whom he has formed for another world by his precepts and his examples. And if the question be raised which is the noblest form of ancestry—the purely zoological or the spiritual ancestry, the parentage of mere animal life or the parentage of the convictions and the ideas which govern life—surely there can be no doubt about the answer,

there can be no doubt which of these ancestries is common to man with the animals below him, and which is his prerogative distinction as a being in whom an immortal and spiritual nature is linked to a bodily form. But without waiving its claim to superiority and leadership, St. Paul resists the Jewish boast that descent from Abraham is limited to those in whose veins the blood of Abraham still flowed, and he claims for Abraham the immeasurably larger family of those who have inherited Abraham's firm hold of a trust in the Unseen, as shown practically in his obedience; and this loftier and vaster spiritual ancestry underlies Mary's language too. The objects of God's mercy are not only or chiefly the natural descendants of the patriarchs, but the millions whose faith in the Unseen is counted to them for righteousness. Why, let me once more ask, should either Israel—the Israel by blood or the Israel by faith—be objects of the Divine mercy? Why? Because mercy radiates from God as do also light and heat from the natural sun. When we Christians name God we do not mean only a resistless force which has brought about and maintains all that we see; we do not mean only a boundless intelligence which has left marks of contrivance and design in all that we see; we mean also and especially that moral quality which is revealed in the gift of all that belongs to self—we mean love. Only by His desire to surround Himself with creatures who might be objects of His love can we account for the mystery of creation, that first, that greatest innovation on the eternal life of God. And when love looks out upon a world, upon a race, upon a single being in whom sin, need, pain, inner dissatisfaction with life as it is are manifest, then love takes the form of mercy. Mercy is love in its attitude towards the suffering, towards the sinful, towards the fallen; and thus mercy was ever presiding over the destinies of Israel. You remember that later Psalm, the 136th, in which this truth is brought out more vividly than anywhere else, perhaps, in the Old Testament. Act after act of God from the making of the heavens, from the laying out of the earth above the waters, down to the deliverance from the prison in Babylon is followed by the line, "For His mercy endureth for ever." It was this which accounted for the wanderings in Egypt, it was this which accounted for the overthrow of Pharaoh, for the passage through the wilderness, for the conquest of Sihon and Og, the kings of

the Amorites, and of Bashan—"His mercy endureth for ever." And Mary, she would place the Divine Incarnation, too, in the light of this luminous, this gracious attribute, of the activity of which it was the crowning, the supreme expression, "He, remembering His mercy, hath holpen His servant Israel."

But a second account of the help thus vouchsafed to Israel follows. God was pledged. "He hath holpen His servant Israel as He promised," or spake, "to our forefathers." The question has been asked how God could ever have pledged His word to man, and a sort of antecedent impossibility of His doing so has in some quarters been taken for granted, to the discredit of the Bible narrative. This is only a variety of the general presumption against revelation which has sometimes been made to do duty for serious argument. Why should not God, if He so wills, do that which any of His reasonable creatures can do at their pleasure? Why should not He, as do we, if He so wills, unveil His mind? Why should not He, if He so wills, pledge His word of promise? The assumption that, for some undefined reason, He cannot do these things breaks down as soon as we look it steadily in the face, although doubtless His method of doing them varies in the different ages of human history. An angel, an inspired soul, even a dream may be in one age a channel of a revelation or of a promise. The Author of all intercourse between one of His creatures and another can Himself surely hold intercourse with His creatures in the way that seems to Him the best. Now, among the promises to the Patriarchs which Mary glances at, those may be presumed to be especially in her view which stated whether distinctly or by implication that the Promised One would be born of their descendants. Thus the promise ran to Abraham in Haran: "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed;" at Hebron: "I will establish My covenant with Israel for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him;" in the Plain of Mamre: "Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him;" after the offering of Isaac: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed My voice;" or, again, to Isaac in Gerar: "I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father, and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and in thy seed shall all the nations

of the earth be blessed ;” and to Jacob at Bethel : “ Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and they shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south, and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” These promises, besides connecting the anticipated blessing with the descendants of Abraham, make two other assertions about it. It was to extend to the whole human race. To each of the three patriarchs was this in return assured, as if to rebuke by anticipation the narrow prejudices of the latter Jews, and it was to last throughout all time. Unlike other promises to nations or to dynasties, it was not conditioned, it would not be transitory in its effects, it would not depend upon the fortunes of a people or form of government, it would outlive the vicissitudes which come with time, it was embodied in the everlasting covenant, it would hold good for evil, and in later years this promise to the first patriarchs became step by step increasingly definite. Its realisation was limited, first of all, to the tribe of Judah, then to their family of David ; then the person of the Promised One comes more clearly into view, and Isaiah foretells His miraculous birth, His atoning sufferings, His eventual triumph, and, with a nearly contemporary prophet, Micah, although in different terms, His essential divinity ; and, lastly, Daniel fixes the date of His appearance, and Malachi proclaims even His coming to the temple, and the triumph of His name and His worship in the heathen world. Reflect how such promises as these would have been talked over again and again from generation to generation, century to century, in every Jewish household ; how the old people would pass them on to the younger, and how these—at first, perhaps, thinking lightly of them, as young people do of traditions which are interesting, as they think, to a past generation—would come in time, as they grew older, to perceive their importance. Great, indeed, was that importance. For two reigns only, and for a period very far short of a century, did Israel attain to anything like political splendour, or even consideration. When Solomon had been laid with his fathers, and the division of the ten tribes and the two had taken place, Israel’s place in the world was to all outward appearance insignificant indeed when compared with that of the sur-

rounding monarchies. There is nothing, or little, of this world's splendour to stir the imagination or to feed the national pride of the descendants of the Patriarch—no walls or palaces like those of Babylon; no navigable river teeming with industry and life like the Nile; nay, the Temple of Jerusalem itself was of diminutive proportions when contrasted with the splendid structures which had existed in Egypt from a date long before the days of Moses. Not only had the divided people little to show in the way of distant conquests, they gradually lost what had been acquired by David and by Solomon, and as years went on there was less and less ground for thinking that Israel ever could be a great power in the Eastern world. And thus, in the absence of ground for satisfaction with their present circumstances, earnest souls were driven to make more of the old promises which were handed down to them. If they had no great share in the present, they had good hopes of the future; if man was not likely to do much for them, they had confidence that one day God would do much both for them, and through them for others. But years passed. First came one disaster, then another—the captivity of Israel by the Assyrians; the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar; the captivity of Judah in Babylon; the profound distress, the many humiliations of the exile; the many vicissitudes which followed on the return, and notably the hard struggle against Antiochus Epiphanes, who desired to substitute Greek Paganism of thought and life for the religion which was revealed to Moses and the prophets. Often in days when all seemed going to ruin, and men's hearts were faint, the question must have been asked in many a humble cottage up and down the country whether God had forgotten to be gracious, and whether He would shut up His loving-kindness in displeasure. So Isaiah:—“Zion saith, The Lord hath forsaken me and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands: thy walls are continually before Me.” And at a later period, when the prospect had grown much darker, Jeremiah reminds his despairing countrymen, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised

unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah; in those days and at that time will I cause the branch of righteousness to grow up unto David." "Thus saith the Lord, If ye can break My covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night, that there should not be day and night in their season, then may also My covenant be broken with David, My servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne." And so the years passed on. It was a long night of expectation, and generation after generation died, as it had lived, in hope; but at last the first streaks of the dawn were seen in the East; it was understood that the sun of righteousness was rising on the world. "He hath raised up," sings Zacharias, "a mighty salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our forefathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He sware to our forefather Abraham, that He would give us"; or, as Mary sings, "He hath holpen His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy, as He spake unto our forefathers."

Now, the Gospel which was preached by Mary's Divine Son, and which has Him, not only for its Author, but for its central subject, contains, as St. Peter reminds us, "great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

But the fulfilment of these promises is in large measure yet to come. Men feel it easy to believe in God's past faithfulness simply because of the past witnesses to His faithfulness; but they hesitate about the future. They assume without saying it that He is less present to us than He was to our forefathers, and that, in accordance with some modern ways of thinking and talking, His hand is shortened that He cannot save.

At any rate, my brethren, we cannot doubt that God may be trusted to keep His word in the world of nature. We lay out our lives upon the presumption that He will do so. We go to bed without any misgivings as to whether the sun will rise the next morning, we make plans for the autumn, feeling sure it will be followed by the winter, and for the winter knowing that it will be succeeded by the spring, and in time by

the summer and by the autumn again. All the proceedings of our farmers and of our sailors—nay, of our chemists and our physicians—are based on the calculation that God will be true to His general rules of working, that God has given to the world of nature laws which shall not be broken, and our men of science cross the Atlantic to take observations, say, of an eclipse, which they are sure will begin to be visible at a certain place, at a given hour, at a given minute, because long observation has taught them the Almighty Creator never fails to keep His appointments exactly. Indeed, so exact is He that they themselves sometimes would seem to fail to remember that He works or lives at all. The mechanism of nature shuts out from their view the Great Engineer by its faultless regularity, or sometimes God's constant observance of His rules is even pleaded as a reason for foregoing the duties of prayer and thanksgiving, since all, it is presumed, will go on quite as well whether we address our prayers to Him or not. And this, indeed, is why He sometimes stays His beneficent hand and shows us, in what we in our ignorance call "the caprices of nature"—in the drought, in the storm, in the deluge of waters, in the destroying plague—that He is ever at work behind the veil, and that we cannot with impunity trifle with Him as if He were only an unintelligent force strangely engaged, we cannot say why, in the complex and subtle manipulation of matter.

And if He keeps His appointments in the world of nature, much more does He keep them in the moral sphere; for while nature might have been in countless ways other than what it is, the moral law could not have been other than what it is, since it expresses in human speech the nature of God as applied to the circumstances of human life. God might have made us men with differently shaped bodies, with differently furnished minds, but without being untrue to Himself He never could have said to us, "Thou mayest do murder; thou mayest commit adultery; thou mayest steal." If the laws of nature, as we call them, fail not, much more impossible is it that the laws of the moral world should fail. If seed time is followed by harvest, and day by night, much more certain is it that "God is not mocked," and that "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap; he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption,

and he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." God's own essential nature is concerned in maintaining the unfailing regularity of His rules for governing the moral world. "Wherefore should the wicked blaspheme God, while he doth say in his heart: Tush! Thou God carest not for it; surely Thou hast seen it, for Thou beholdest ungodliness and wrong." "God is not unrighteous that He should forget your work and labour that proceedeth of love." Even a great heathen, like Sophocles, contemplating without revelation the moral order of human life, could recognise "the steadfast laws that walk the sky, laws born and reared in the ethereal heaven of which Olympus is alone the sire, to which no race of mortal man gave birth, nor shall oblivion lay to sleep." The Gospel contains Divine promises to the Christian society or church, and to the Christian soul. Why should we think they are less likely to be observed than God's rules for the movements of the stars or for enforcement of virtue and the expression of vice? To the Church there is, for instance, the great promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. This promise enables a believing Christian to survey, not indeed without distress, but certainly without misgiving, much that he sees around him. Our Lord prayed for unity, and we behold everywhere among Christians division; our Lord made holiness a note of His kingdom, and holiness among Christians in the exception rather than the rule; our Lord promised His Spirit to guide into all truth, and we see men adding to, or taking away from, the truth into which the Apostles were guided. Nor is the difficulty to be removed by suggesting that one fragment of the Church is the whole of it, or, worse still, that the true Church of Christ is an invisible society. These are but the expedients, the poor expedients, of controversial necessity; they will not bear the wear and tear of reflection. No; we must admit that an enemy has sown tares among the wheat; that of the Gospel, too, it is true that, whereas "the hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars," it has come to pass that it lies with its hedge broken down, so "that all they that go by pluck off her grapes; the wild boar out of the wood doth root it up, and the wild beasts of the field devour it."

Certainly the Church's weakness and divisions are the profit

and opportunity of unbelief, which never was so threatening, and never had in its service so many fine intellects as it has to-day since the first times of the Christian Church. But then there lies our charter—"The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." There may be temporary discouragement and defeat, there may be a falling away of prominent men, of large classes of men, of entire branches of the Church of Christ. We do not know; all this, perhaps more than this, is possible; what is not possible is that the Divine kingdom should perish from off the face of the earth before the day of the Lord's coming.

And then to the Christian soul there are many and precious promises, on which we may lean during the days of our pilgrimage, and of the eventual fulfilment of which there can be for a Christian no room for doubt—promises of deliverance from spiritual foes; promises of victory over insurgent passions; promises of an inward presence which shall make the soul a temple of God; promises of joy and peace in believing; promises which transcend the world, which pierce the veil of the next, which embrace in their mighty scope not only time, but also eternity: "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest." "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, and ye shall find rest for your souls." "If any man love Me he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." "In My Father's house there are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also." "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." "He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels." "To him that overcometh will I give to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with My Father on His throne." There are times when even good Christians are tempted to ask whether such bright and gracious words will ever be realised. Let them remember how long Israel waited before the words spoken to the Patriarchs were fulfilled in the birth of the Son of Mary. Be sure that no word of God returns to Him empty, or without accomplishing the purpose for which

He sent it. It is so with God's laws in nature, it is so with His moral rules ; it cannot be otherwise with His promises to His servants. If He was true to His word in dealing with the old Israel, He will not fail those who belong to the Israel of God. The conviction that God will keep His pledges to help us carries us, as nothing else can, through the troublous changes of outward circumstances. Those changes sometimes go far to break down the faith of men who have believed for years—narrow means, weak health, the decease of those whom we care for most on earth—"Why," men are tempted to ask—"why, if God is alive, and if He loves us, should He permit it?" Christians sometimes forget they are to be tried as other men are not ; that they are not to count such trials strange ; that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth ;" that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory." That which seems so accidental, so purposeless, is really designed to train us gradually for a higher life ; those sorrows which seem to show that we are the sport of some heartless chance, are but so many blows of the chisel of the Eternal Artist, who is fashioning the character for its high destiny out of the rude material which passes under His hand and eye. No one trial is aimless or unneeded. Poverty, sickness, loss of friends, each has its appointed work to do ; and beyond all there is the certainty that He will be true to His promises, true to those that overcome the temptation, the terrible temptation, to doubt His word. The morning need not be far distant from any one of us when we shall praise Him "who saveth our life from destruction, and crowneth us with mercy and loving-kindness, and satisfieth our mouth with good things, making us young and lusty as an eagle."

And this same conviction braces us to encounter these trials of heart and mind which sometimes beat much more hardly on a man than anything outward. You have done your best, you say, and you have met with nothing but disappointment ; you have done your best for some noble cause, and you are credited with devotion to purely selfish ends ; your love and energy have met with ingratitude and contempt. What, you are tempted to ask, is the good of efforts which lead to nothing, at least, so far as you see, in those for whose sake they are made? And then you are out of heart about yourself. You had meant

sincerely to consecrate your life to God, and, lo! you find that the soul which should be a temple of His perpetual presence is degraded by a hundred little sins which are utterly alien to Him—by some vulgar social pride, by some ill-natured and spiteful grudge, by acts or words dictated by covetousness, or by envy. You had hoped that you had gone far enough along the road to the heavenly Jerusalem to be out of the reach of these ignominious sins; but there are days when they seem to have been so numerous, and to represent so much of unchastened character, of unsubdued passion, of decomposing faith, that your heart fairly sinks within you, and you doubt whether you will ever reach the heavenly goal. Certainly you cannot fall back for comfort on your own poor heart, which is not in the same mood, I will dare to say, for two days running. You know it to be perpetually changing, or, as the Bible says, “deceitful above all things.” In the morning, perhaps, you are happy and hopeful, and before night you are in misery and despair; to-day you are in ecstasies as if Paradise were in view, and to-morrow you are the victim of the most gloomy depression; one week the vision of your inner life is the clear blue sky, with the brilliant rays of the eternal sun playing upon you, and the next all is overclouded, and you are apparently in the darkest shadow. Certainly this poor, changing, vacillating heart of ours yields but a sorry resource in the troubles of life. Our only real deliverance lies in rising out of ourselves, and taking firm hold of Him, and on the promises of Him who does not change. In His own time He will be as good as His word; the disappointments will be seen to have been the steps in our probation, the temptations, the humiliating faults that teach us self-distrust, will have vanished altogether, the varying moods of joy and depression will have been exchanged for an eternal sunshine.

This is the closing lesson of the *Magnificat*. Mary leaves us with the conviction that God’s promises may remain, even for long ages, unfulfilled, but that they will be fulfilled at last. “He hath holpen His servant Israel, as He promised to our forefathers.” And for us to-day the vision of life and of the world beyond it is yet for an appointed time, but in the end it shall speak and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come; it will not tarry.

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